



**STUDIES IN POETRY**









*Winnyson*

# STUDIES IN POETRY

*CRITICAL, ANALYTICAL,  
INTERPRETATIVE*

BY

THOMAS O'HAGAN, M.A., PH.D.

BOSTON:

MARLIER & COMPANY, LIMITED,  
173 TREMONT STREET.

*Copyright, 1900,*  
**BY THOMAS O'HAGAN**

PN  
1101  
- 06

TO ALL WHO DREAM AND BUILD AND DWELL IN THE  
ENCHANTED REALMS OF POESY

*This volume is inscribed by*

THE AUTHOR.

146443



## THE STUDY OF POETRY

ART has its root in the spiritual, and poetry, which is in many ways the greatest of the arts, cannot be properly studied or interpreted save through the spiritual.

Now, as the first function of any piece of art is to give delight in some form, the reader of poetry must seek for this delight and joy, which should flow from every true poem.

The primary and chief purpose in the study of poetry is not discipline and instruction, but exaltation and inspiration, — the liberation of the imagination and enrichment of the spirit.

For poetry, which is the flowering of the soul, the golden ear of the century, the summit of thought, is something more than thought. It is, as Dr. Hamilton Mabie says, "thought plus the personality of a man of genius."

The insulated intellect cannot get the best out of a poem, for poetry appeals to the whole man as a thinking, rational, moral, and spiritual being.

## THE STUDY OF POETRY

All poetry, too, is written to be read, to be voiced, and only through vocal interpretation can the indefinite element in a poem be reached.

Nor should any analytical exegesis be entered upon till the poem as a work of art, as an artistic unit, has impressed itself upon the mind and soul.

Let both teacher and student have a care, too, that they pause not at the threshold of the temple of poetry, lest they catch not a vision of the glory upon the altar within!

T. O'H.

TORONTO, CANADA, May 1, 1900.

## CONTENTS.

---

	PAGE
TENNYSON'S "IN MEMORIAM" . . . . .	1
BROWNING'S "A DEATH IN THE DESERT" . . . .	24
MRS. BROWNING'S "SONNETS FROM THE PORTU- GUESE" . . . . .	38
✓ WORDSWORTH'S ODE "ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMOR- TALITY" . . . . .	51
✓ COLERIDGE'S "ANCIENT MARINER" . . . . .	70
SHELLEY'S "PROMETHEUS UNBOUND" . . . . .	81
✓ KEATS'S "EVE OF ST. AGNES" . . . . .	92
GRAY'S "ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD" . .	102





# STUDIES IN POETRY



## TENNYSON'S "IN MEMORIAM"

LIKE Dante's "Divina Commedia" and Goethe's "Faust," Tennyson's "In Memoriam" is a world-poem. It is an autobiographic document of the nineteenth century, mirroring its deepest life and summing up its most subtle and complex thought.

The Place of  
"In Memoriam"  
in the  
Literature of  
the World.

Like every great poem, too, it is a chapter in the spiritual history of the race — a revelation of what is in the heart of man, in his contact with the world. Poetry which has its root in the spiritual universalizes and eternalizes. It deals with the permanent and absolute in man — with that which is independent of both time and place. "In Memoriam" is a lyrical drama of the soul, the record of a great moral and intellectual conflict, "the poetical expression of a soul's moral and intellectual growth through sorrow, and through strife with the difficulties that beset the truths and mysteries of religion."

If "In Memoriam" did naught but embalm a personal sorrow, it would not be the great art-product that it is. Not until the genesis of its particular sorrow swells out into the universal, does the deep significance of this great poem lay hold of us; then indeed we realize that "In Memoriam" is a world-poem, that it touches the eternal in man, that within this great Cathedral of sorrow we may each and all find an oratory or chapel, — an altar decked with the flowers of our own particular grief.

The proper approach to the study and interpretation of a poem is always of paramount value to a student. Let us see, therefore, what **The Approach to its Study.** should be our approach to a clear, careful, and sympathetic interpretation of this great masterpiece. Just here let it be remembered at the outset that the charm of "In Memoriam" resides in the poetry and not in the thought; that, as Dr. Hamilton Mabie says, it issues out of the totality of the poem, and not out of any single element. "In Memoriam" should, then, be studied first as a work of art. When the complete beauty and charm of the poem have impressed themselves, it is time to seek for the meaning of the poem, — to probe its depth and get at its secret. Little by little through a study of its integral parts, lyric by lyric, the student will be led to observe the

noble unity of the whole poem. He will observe, too, how the lyrics or sections are related to each other, grow out of each other, and sometimes are a complement of each other. Before studying each lyric separately and seeking out its central idea, the question of the germ-thought or poetic moment of the poem should also first receive attention, for this germ-thought has not a little to do in the fashioning, moulding, and coloring of the whole poem — it is this germ-thought which, so to speak, holds the poem in its moral orbit. What stanza or stanzas, then, contain the germ-thought of "In Memoriam"? Is not the nucleus of thought around which the whole poem crystallizes to be found in these well known and oft-quoted lines? —

"This truth came borne with bier and pall,  
I felt it when I sorrow'd most,  
'Tis better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all."

The question as to how much Tennyson is indebted in the construction of "In Memoriam" to the great masters who preceded him, can never be fully ascertained. There is no doubt, as Brother Azarias points out, that the author had before his mind, as he wrote, the sonnets and odes of Petrarch on the death of Laura, Shakespeare's sonnets, and Shelley's "Adonais." Although Tennyson tells us himself,

**The Plan and  
Technique  
of the Poem.**

in speaking of "In Memoriam," "the general way of its being written was so queer that if there were a blank space I would put in a poem," that he formulated at the outset the plan which shines through his work as an organic whole seems, nevertheless, more than probable. The fact that the author, according to his own words, added a lyric here and a lyric there does not nullify this probability.

Now, as to the stanza employed in "In Memoriam," a very interesting study of rhyme effect is afforded through its examination. Did Tennyson borrow this form of stanza from Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Ben Jonson, or Dante Gabriel Rossetti? for all three had employed it before Tennyson had put his hand to the "In Memoriam." We believe a careful study of the "In Memoriam" stanza form will convince the reader or student that, while not original, it became in the author's hands a poetic necessity — an outcome of the moulding power or divine energy of inspiration. It will be noticed, too, how admirably adapted the form of this stanza is, with its second and third verses closely braced, and the terminal rhyme emphasis of the stanza reduced, for bearing along unchecked the flow of spiritualized sorrow, thus imparting to the poem throughout a true elegiac tone.

Where the stanzas admit of a change in the

rhyme-scheme without affecting the sense, let the student convert them into alternate rhymes and notice how this transposition will change the whole tone of the poem. There is atmosphere in a poem as well as in a painting, and were the alternate rhyme-scheme to be introduced in this atmosphere it would not serve so well to conduct the indefinitely spiritual element which constitutes the essential life of this poem. A fine example of the peculiar adaptedness of the stanza employed in "In Memoriam" to the continuous flow of thought is to be found in the eighty-sixth section. It is said to have been a favorite lyric of Tennyson's. Note how continuous and even is the movement of the verse, how the sense is suspended till the close, and what a charm there is in the reposeful ending on the final word "Peace":

- "Sweet after showers, ambrosial air,  
That rollest from the gorgeous gloom  
Of evening over brake and bloom  
And meadow, slowly breathing bare
- "The round of space, and rapt below  
Thro' all the dewy-tassell'd wood,  
And shadowing down the horned flood  
In ripples, fan my brows and blow
- "The fever from my cheek, and sigh  
The full new life that feeds thy breath  
Throughout my frame, till Doubt and Death  
Ill brethren, let the fancy fly

"From belt to belt of crimson seas,  
On leagues of odour, streaming far  
To where, in yonder orient star,  
A hundred spirits whisper 'Peace.'"

It is customary on the part of some critics to make a general onslaught on "In Memoriam"

**Catholic Aspects of "In Memoriam."** and charge it with being a poem of scepticism. It is indeed quite easy to

make such a charge, but it is much more difficult to convict it from its own teachings. "In Memoriam" is not a poem of scepticism, but the record of a soul growing through doubt into faith. Not only is "In Memoriam" not a poem of scepticism, but there is much in its teachings that coincides with Catholic dogma.

The very opening invocation in the prologue to the poem, written by the poet in 1849, testifies to Tennyson's faith in the Divinity of Christ and the mysteries of God:

"Strong Son of God, immortal Love,  
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,  
By faith, and faith alone embrace,  
Believing where we cannot prove."

In the third stanza he says:—

"Thou madest man, he knows not why."

Here the poet departs from Catholic teaching, else what is the meaning of the Incarnation of the

"Son of God" and nineteen centuries of light of his divine gospel? Yet does not the poet himself tell us in the very same lyric why man was created? —

"Our wills are ours, we know not how;  
Our wills are ours, to make them thine."

In the fourth stanza of the same prologue, addressing the "Son of God," the poet says:

"Thou seemest human and divine  
The highest, holiest manhood, thou."

This would, at first reading, appear to imply a doubt as to the divinity of Christ, but if a careful and an extended study be made of the meaning which Tennyson attaches to the word *seem*, it will be found that no such meaning can be or should be read out of this line; for the poet uses the word *seem* here, not in the sense of appearing to be what a thing is *not*, but in the sense of appearing to be *what it is*.

In the third last stanza of the prologue and in the first stanza of the thirty-third section, note the use attached to the word *seem*:

"Forgive what *seem'd* my sin in me;  
What *seem'd* my worth since I began.

O Thou that after toil and storm  
Mayst *seem* to have reached a purer air."



How very close to Catholic doctrine, too, is Tennyson's invocation of the departed in sections ninety-three and ninety-four :

"I shall not see thee. Dare I say  
No spirit ever brake the band  
That stays him from the native land  
Where first he walk'd when claspt in clay ?

"O, therefore from thy sightless range  
With gods in unconjectured bliss,  
O, from the distance of the abyss  
Of tenfold-complicated change,

"Descend, and touch, and enter; hear  
The wish too strong for words to name;  
That in this blindness of the frame  
My ghost may feel that thine is near.

"How pure at heart and sound in head,  
With what divine affections bold  
Should be the man whose thought would hold  
An hour's communion with the dead."

With Tennyson, prayer is the truest religion. This is set forth in the thirty-second and thirty-third sections :

"Thrice blest whose lives are faithful prayers,  
Whose loves in higher love endure;  
What souls possess themselves so pure,  
Or is there blessedness like theirs ?"

"Leave thou thy sister when she prays,  
Her early Heaven, her happy views;  
Nor thou with shadow'd hint confuse  
A life that leads melodious lays."

Again, take sections one hundred and twenty-three and one hundred and twenty-four and compare them with Cardinal Newman's beautiful passage in the "Apologia," page 377, and note how parallel they are in line of argument in their proof of the existence of a God. Both Newman and Tennyson consider that the voice of conscience and the feelings of the heart are much more conclusive of the existence of a God than any arguments that are discoverable in the works of nature. Tennyson's lines are :

"There rolls the deep where grew the tree,  
O Earth, what changes hast thou seen !  
There where the long street roars, hath been  
The stillness of the central sea.

"The hills are shadows, and they flow  
From form to form, and nothing stands;  
They melt like mist, the solid lands,  
Like clouds they shape themselves and go.

"But in my spirit will I dwell  
And dream my dream, and hold it true;  
For though my lips may breathe adieu  
I cannot think the thing farewell.

## STUDIES IN POETRY

"If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep,  
I heard a voice 'believe no more'  
And heard an ever breaking shore  
That tumbled in the Godless deep;

"A warmth within the breast would melt  
The freezing reason's colder part,  
And like a man in wrath the heart  
Stood up and answered 'I have felt.'"

Newman tells us, "Were it not for this voice speaking so clearly in my conscience and my heart, I should be an atheist or a pantheist or a polytheist when I looked into the world. . . . I am far from denying the real force of the arguments in proof of a God drawn from the general facts of human society; but these do not warm me or enlighten me; they do not take away the winter of my desolation or make the buds unfold and the leaves grow within me and my moral being rejoice."

Who has ever rebutted in verse more ably than Tennyson has in the "In Memoriam" the arguments adduced by infidels in support of their unbelief? — as witness the following sections of the poem: The Fates not blind, III; Life shall be for evermore, XXXIV; If Death were death, love would not be true love, XXXV; Individuality defies the tomb, XLVI; Immortality, LIV and LV; Doubt issuing in belief, XCV; Knowledge without wisdom, CXIII;

Progress, CXVII; We are not all matter, CXIX;  
and The course of human things, CXXVII.

There is one stanza in section ninety-six which is often quoted by those who charge "In Memoriam" with being a poem of scepticism, and declare its ethical teaching to be dangerous, that demands our attention at this point for a moment. Here is the oft cited quatrain:

"Perplext in faith but pure in deeds,  
At last he beat his music out.  
There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds!"

It should be remembered that faith, which has held conflict with doubt throughout the whole development and progress of the poem, has not gained supremacy at this point, and does not gain full supremacy till the close of the poem, — doubt pressing in many instances, as here, hard upon the shield of faith. It is easy to single out stanzas in "In Memoriam" wherein doubt is the flowering of sorrow not yet sanctified, and faith comes out of the conflict apparently maimed; and so has it often been in conflicts in the world. Faith appears to suffer for the time, but ever comes out triumphant at the close.

"In Memoriam" is a history of the genesis of a great sorrow, and the story of a heart girt around,

encompassed, by the perplexing problems of life, death, and the mystery of hereafter. Never before was there such a beautiful temple of song erected to the memory of man, and Arthur Hallam may indeed rest secure within its transepts, assured of the undying light of immortality. "In Memoriam" is both biographical and autobiographical. It deals with the character, friendship, and memory of one of the most gifted and perfect young men who have ever lived in the tide of times. It is autobiographical in so far as it records the life history of the author himself through the various phases of sorrow which mark the progress of the poem.

While reading "In Memoriam" once to Mr. James Knowles, Tennyson thus commented on the poem as to its personal and impersonal character:

"It is rather the cry of the whole human race than mine. In the poem altogether, private grief swells out into thought of and hope for the whole world. It begins with a funeral and ends with a marriage; begins with death and ends in promise of a new life, — a sort of Divine Comedy, cheerful at the close. It is a very impersonal poem as well as personal. There is more about myself in 'Ulysses,' which was written under the sense of loss, and that all had gone by, but that still life

must be fought out to the end. It was more written with the feeling of his loss upon me than many poems in 'In Memoriam.' . . . It's too hopeful, this poem, more than I am myself. . . . The general way of its being written was so queer that if there were a blank space I would put in a poem. . . . I think of adding another to it, a speculative one, bringing out the thoughts of the Higher Pantheism and showing that all the arguments are about as good on one side as the other, and thus throw man back more on the primitive impulses and feelings."

These three epochs of grief belong to the stages in the development of every true sorrow, and if we examine the genesis or development of the sorrow in "In Memoriam," from sensuous sorrow at the outset to sanctified sorrow at the close, it will be found that these three forms of grief correspond very distinctly with the three periods in the life of the poem. From section one to section seventy-one inclusive, we have grief felt: VI-VIII, grief and sense; IX-XXI, grief and imagination; XXII-XXVII, grief and thought; XXVIII-XXXVII, grief in the atmosphere of faith. Change here of key from faith to hope: XXXVIII-XLIX, grief and hope; L-LVIII, grief in faith and hope united; LIX-LXV, grief and love; LXVI-

Three Epochs  
of Grief: Grief  
Felt; Grief  
Reflected on;  
Grief Trans-  
formed.

LXXI, grief in the region beyond consciousness. From LXXII to XCVII, we have grief reflected on: LXXII-LXXVII, the world's loss in him estimated; LXXVIII-LXXXIII, my own loss in him estimated; LXXXIV-LXXXVIII, memories linked with hopes; LXXXIX-XCVII, our communion an intellectual one. From XCVIII to CXXXI, we have grief transformed: XCVIII-CVI, to heighten the contrast, the poet allows himself to be carried back by associations of time and by the severing of associations of place to renewed freshness of grief, but shakes off this feeling and loses it in the world's hope; CVII-CXV, the fruit of sorrow the deathless ideal; CXVI-CXXV, grief, too, has its spring of transformation; CXXVI-CXXXI, the victory of love.

Let there be added here the "nine natural groups or divisions" of the poem as given to Mr. Knowles by Tennyson himself: From I to VIII; from IX to XX; from XXI to XXVII; from XXVIII to XLIX; from L to LVIII; from LIX to LXI; from LXII to XCVIII; from XCIX to CIII and from CIV to CXXXI.

When Tennyson hears of Arthur's death he is overwhelmed with grief. His sorrow drowns the world. Nature seems purposeless—

**The Anniver-  
saries of Ar-  
thur Hallam's  
Death.**

"A hollow form with empty hands."  
The darkness of his heart he finds symbolized in the sullen changeless yew tree.

"And gazing on thee, sullen tree,  
Sick for thy stubborn hardihood,  
I seem to fail from out my blood,  
And grow incorporate into thee."

He regards sorrow as a "cruel fellowship," rails against it, and repels the trite condolence that loss is common to the race. Even sleep, the "balm of hurt minds," gives way and in the gray dawn of morning he visits the house of Hallam on Wimpole street.

"Dark house, by which once more I stand,  
Here in the long unlovely street.  
Doors, where my heart was used to beat  
So quickly, waiting for a hand.

"A hand that can be clasped no more, —  
Behold me, for I cannot sleep,  
And like a guilty thing I creep  
At earliest morning to the door."

At the end of a year, as the first anniversary of Arthur's death comes around (section LXXII), there is little abatement in his sorrow. His world seems yet dominated by sorrow, and nature shares this influence. He does not rail against nature —

" . . . no, nor death;  
For nothing is that errs from law."

When the next anniversary dawns (Sept. 15, 1836) (section XCIX), the tone is changed, the



birds are singing, the meadows breathe softly of the past, and the woodlands are holy to the dead. But the greatest change is that the transformation in Tennyson's sorrow has brought him to think less of his own pain, and more of the pain of mankind.

When the bells of the first Christmas Eve ring out peace and good-will (section XXVIII), he remembers that he had almost wished to die in his grief before he heard them, but they control his spirit with a touch of joy. Faith brings hope and consolation; and here we have the first prophecy of the soul's triumph over sorrow, — the first budding and blossoming of hope:

The Three  
Christmas-  
tides.

“Our voices took a higher range;  
Once more we sang: ‘They do not die,  
Nor lose their mortal sympathy,  
Nor change to us, although they change.

“Rise, happy morn, rise, holy morn,  
Draw forth the cheerful day from night:  
O Father, touch the east, and light  
The light that shone when Hope was born.’”

The anniversary of the second Christmas is not so sad as the first. The snow is silent and the day calm. A sense of loss broods over nature, but

sorrow within his heart, now calm, is reflected in peace around him:

"O last regret, Regret can die!"

Not yet has his grief passed out of the personal into the universal, nor has the poet escaped from himself. His half-intellectual analysis of doubts, and the replies of the understanding to them have as yet brought his soul no victory. There has been a lull in his sorrow, but no real transformation.

The third Christmastide (1837) beholds a change in everything (section CIV.). Tennyson has moved from Lincolnshire, and the change from the old home for another has broken, like the growth of time, the bond of dying use.

"No more shall wayward grief abuse  
The genial hour with mask and mime;  
For change of place, like growth of time,  
Has broke the bond of dying use.

"Be neither song, nor game, nor feast;  
Nor harp be touch'd, nor flute be blown;  
No dance, no motion, save alone  
What lightens in the lucid east

"Of rising worlds by yonder wood.  
Long sleeps the summer in the seed;  
Run out your measured arcs, and lead  
The closing cycle rich in good."



Arthur's death, the three Christmastides and the three springtides. The contrasts that mark these periods of grief are enough to indicate clearly "that 'In Memoriam' is the history of a soul in progress from darkness to light; from the selfishness to the unselfishness of sorrow; from despair of God and man to faith in both; and, as a personal matter, from the thought that friendship was utterly lost in death to the thought that friendship was gained through death at a higher level of love and with a deeper union."

No person can read the "In Memoriam" without feeling the delight imparted by its vital beauty. So many of its lyrics are as polished as the bosom of a star, so many deep-set with meaning and freighted with significance, that the making of a choice is beset with embarrassment. Here are five stanzas (section XI.) which sound like one long rippling swell of Cathedral music:

Some of the  
More Beautiful  
and Significant  
Lyrics.

"Calm is the morn without a sound,  
Calm as to suit a calmer grief,  
And only thro' the faded leaf  
The chestnut pattering to the ground:

"Calm and deep peace on this high wold,  
And on these dews that drench the furze,  
And all the silvery gossamers  
That twinkle into green and gold:

## STUDIES IN POETRY

"Calm and still light on yon great plain  
That sweeps, with all its autumn bowers,  
And crowded farms and lessening towers,  
To mingle with the bounding main :

"Calm and deep peace in this wide air,  
These leaves that redden to the fall;  
And in my heart, if calm at all,  
If any calm, a calm despair :

"Calm on the seas, and silver sleep,  
And waves that sway themselves in rest.  
And dead calm in that noble breast  
Which heaves but with the heaving deep."

Again, the lyric which makes up the sixty-fourth section is full of beauty, strength, and significance :

"Dost thou look back on what hath been,  
As some divinely gifted man,  
Whose life in low estate began,  
And on a simple village green ;

"Who breaks his birth's invidious bar,  
And grasps the skirts of happy chance,  
And breasts the blows of circumstance,  
And grapples with his evil star ;

"Who makes by force his merit known,  
And lives to clutch the golden keys,  
To mould a mighty state's decrees,  
And shape the whisper of the throne ;  
.  
.  
.  
.  
.

"Who ploughs with pain his native lea,  
And reaps the labor of his hands,  
Or in the furrow musing stands:  
'Does my old friend remember me?'"

Section CI. is a descriptive lyric of great beauty. It should be read and re-read till its charm and beauty find lodgment in the heart.

Section CIII. contains fourteen stanzas, whose meaning will not break upon the mind at first reading. This section is also remarkable for the perfection of its poetic diction. Note the preponderance of Saxon words and the great number of monosyllables. A most admirable interpretation of this section will be found in Brother Azarias' study of the "In Memoriam" in "Phases of Thought and Criticism."

Tennyson tells us that this dream described in CIII. was a real dream, and he has furnished it with this note: "I rather believe that the maidens are the muses, arts, etc. Everything that made life beautiful here we may hope may pass on with us beyond the grave." To Mr. Knowles the poet said that "the maidens are all the human powers and talents that do not pass with life, but go along with it." The "river" is "life," and the "hidden summits" are the high, the divine, — the origin of life." The sea in the fourth stanza is eternity. The seventh stanza

refers to "the great progress of the age as well as the opening of another world;" and the ninth to "all the great hopes of science and men."

Section CIX. is valuable as setting forth the character and gifts of Arthur Hallam :

" Heart-affluence in discursive talk  
From household fountains never dry;  
The critic clearness of an eye,  
That saw thro' all the Muses' walk ;

" And manhood fused with female grace  
In such a sort, the child would twine  
A trustful hand, unask'd, in thine,  
And find his comfort in thy face."

The last lyric, or section, in "In Memoriam" contains the whole idea of the poem. Tennyson has struggled through doubt and darkness and has risen to the pure light of faith. This final lyric contains the key to the poet's successful struggle with doubt and sorrow into the clear light of faith. And this clear light of faith has been reached, not through reasoning, but an act of the will. So the poet sings in the final lyric :

**The Deep Im-  
port of the  
Last Lyric.**

" O living will that shalt endure,  
When all that seems shall suffer shock,  
Rise in the spiritual rock,  
Flow thro' our deeds and make them pure,

## "IN MEMORIAM"

23

"That we may lift from out the dust  
A voice as unto him that hears,  
A cry above the conquered years  
To one that with us works, and trust,

"With faith that comes of self-control,  
The truths that never can be proved  
Until we close with all we loved,  
And all we flow from, soul in soul."

### QUESTIONS.

1. Why is "In Memoriam" called a world-poem?
2. What should be our approach to a clear, careful, and sympathetic interpretation of this great masterpiece?
3. What is meant by the germ-thought, or poetic moment of a poem?
4. What stanza or stanzas contain the germ-thought of "In Memoriam"?
5. Discuss, briefly, the plan and technique of the poem.
6. Point out some of the Catholic aspects of "In Memoriam."
7. Illustrate the personal and impersonal character of the poem.
8. What three epochs of grief are developed in the poem?
9. Show the effect of time on Tennyson's sorrow, as reflected through the anniversaries of Arthur Hallam's death.
10. What do the contrasts that mark these periods of grief indicate?
11. Illustrate the beauty and significance of some of the lyrics in the poem.



## BROWNING'S "A DEATH IN THE DESERT."

It will be noticed that Browning has a most abrupt method of introducing his subject. Some-

*The Setting of  
"A Death in  
the Desert."*

times, in consequence of this, we may read page after page of one of his poems before we can quite know whither we are going. To understand Browning fully, to catch the connection and antecedents of his thought, it would be necessary that the student should be a companion of the poet's own reading and research, which were multifarious — it might be almost said universal.

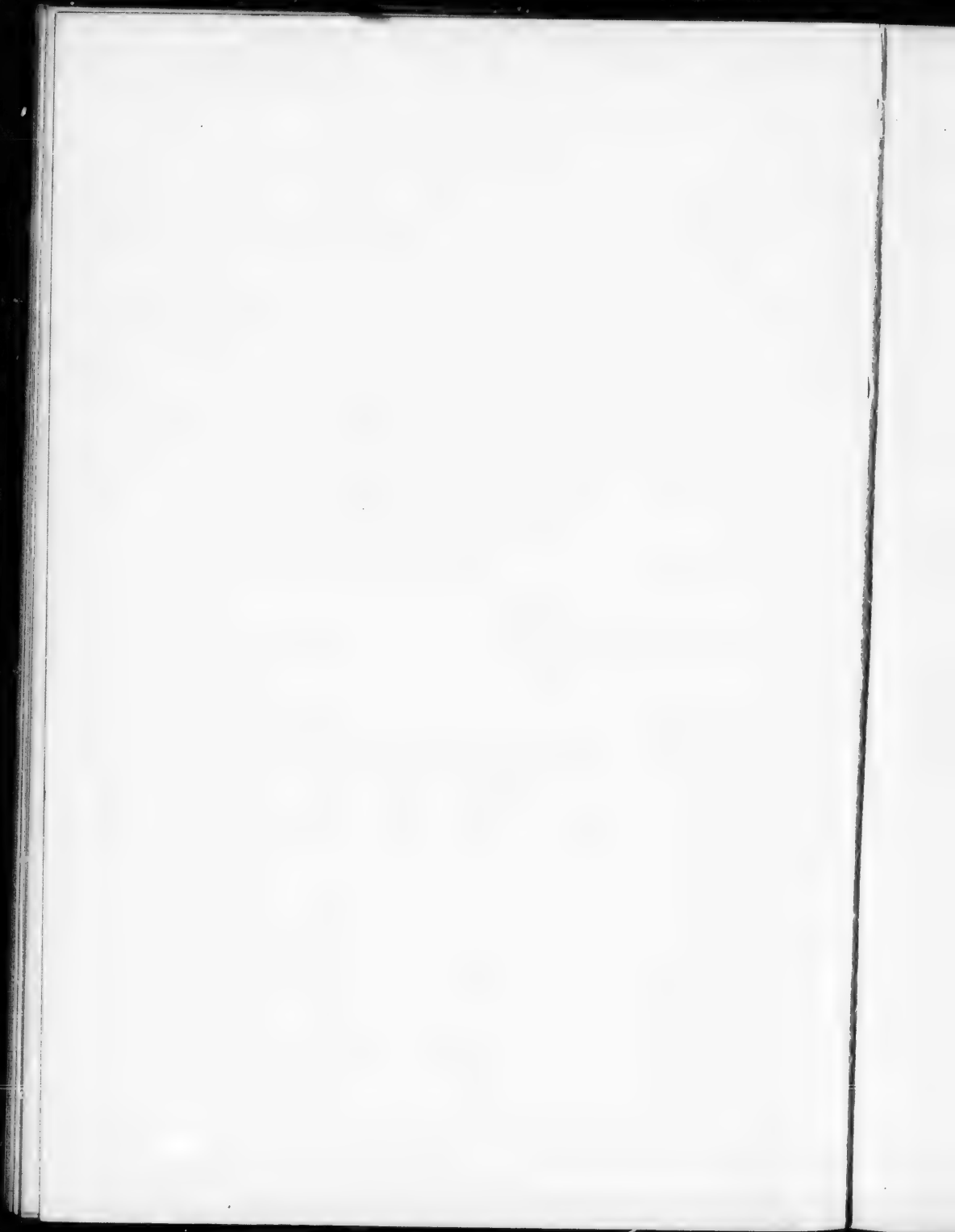
It is said that Browning, on being once asked why he did not popularize and make easy the study of his poems, replied that he did "not write for the smoking-room." It will be well, we think, if every student who takes up the study of Browning would treasure these words of the great seer in his heart, — if he would fruitfully realize how serious and laborious is the effort to follow in the footsteps of the poet's thought.



*Robert Browning*

146443

**UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR LIBRARY**



Brother Azarias, in his essay on Browning, in "Books and Reading," says that he would not recommend the study of Browning to children in years or to children in mind. Certainly, Browning was no "idle singer of an empty day." His lines are freighted with the very deepest meaning, and the study of his poems, in this our day of literary diletanteism and palaver, is indeed a very tonic of the gods.

In studying "A Death in the Desert," it will be well for us to gain our approach to the poem first. Like Browning's *magnum opus*, "The Ring and the Book," this poem is true in spirit, though of course in detail it is largely the work of the poet's imagination. The manner in which the poet breathes into old dead facts, fusing his soul into the "inert stuff," and thus planting life where death had been before, and giving to the dead facts a "resurrection and uprise," is well illustrated by Browning in the following lines:

" Was not Elisha once? —  
Who bade them lay his staff on a corpse-face.  
There was no voice, no hearing: he went in  
Therefore and shut the door upon them twain,  
And prayed unto the Lord: and he went up  
And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch,  
And put his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes  
Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,

And stretched him on the flesh ; the flesh waxed warm :  
And he returned, walked to and fro the house,  
And went up, stretched him on the flesh again,  
And the eyes opened. 'T is a credible feat  
With the right man and way."

There is a certain kinship in Browning's four religious poems : "Caliban upon Setebos," "Cleon," "Rabbi Ben Ezra," and "A Death in the Desert;" and in the study of the latter poem it would be literary wisdom to group these four together. Each poem is representative of a particular phase of religious thought: "the natural, uncultured reasoning of the savage, the cultured reasoning of the Greek, the inspired reasoning of the Jew, and the reason based on the belief in incarnation of the Christian." It will be noticed that the Setebos which Caliban conceives is a reflection from his own nature; but Cleon, the cultured Greek, has advanced beyond the stage where his God is a reflection of himself. The difference between Cleon and the Rabbi in "Rabbi Ben Ezra," as to their idea of the progress of the human soul, is that Cleon's progress is an intellectual progress; while the Rabbi's is a spiritual progress. In the "Death in the Desert" it is the God of love that is made manifest. No place is accorded doubt by St. John. Note how the various stages of religious belief as exemplified

**A Group of Religious Poems.**

by Caliban and Cleon are set forth in the following lines :

"First, like the brute, obliged by facts to learn,  
Next, as man may, obliged by his own mind,  
Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law.  
God's gift was that man should conceive of truth  
And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake,  
As midway help till he reach fact indeed."

It was the attacks upon the historical bases of Christianity, so vigorously maintained in Germany during the beginning and middle of the present century by Strauss and other sceptical philosophers, that determined in Browning's mind the form of the "Death in the Desert." We feel sure, from the unattractive description he gives of the professor in "Christmas Eve," that Browning had little sympathy with this band of sceptics.

**What Determined the Form of the "Death in the Desert."**

In the critical examination of the evangelical records, the Gospel of St. John suffered most. Strauss denied that St. John had anything to do with its composition, pronouncing it to be a controversial work written by some learned Greek Gnostic about the close of the second century. In his poem "A Death in the Desert" Browning restores the St. John of the Gospel, — the disciple of love who leaned on his Master's breast at supper, — mystical and visionary as became him who had

received the revelation of Patmos. It is wonderful how Browning has breathed into this poem — endued it with — the very spirit and character of St. John, the herald of Love Divine. As the last survivor of those who had seen and known Christ, St. John, realizes the responsibility which rests upon him, and he is fearful of the heresies already beginning to disturb the Church, particularly the Ebionites, or followers of Cerinthus.

Now, in order to obtain some definite idea of this noble poem, and reach its meaning, we must first seek the significance and intent of its prologue. This meaning is well set forth by Rev. G. W. Pope, D. D., in his study of this poem, in the following passage: "Some Christian, whose name is not given (9, 10), is supposed to be examining his library, — looking up and classifying his choice treasures. One imagines that he was an Ephesian (or perhaps an Alexandrian); that he may have lived in the beginning of the third century; that it was a time of hot persecution, when he was in daily peril of death; and that he is looking over a few of the more ancient Christian records to strengthen himself for coming trial by the contemplation of the struggles of those that had gone before. He finds among others a parchment scroll attributed to Pamphylax of Antioch, who had died a martyr in Ephesus,

just after the death of St. John the Apostle. This manuscript is described in a very minute and realistic way. It is No. 5 in his library; consists of three skins of parchment glued together; is in the Greek language; is incomplete, since it ranges from *Epsilon* to *Mu*, so that four sections — pages, we may call them — are missing in the beginning, and perhaps some at the end. This precious manuscript is kept in a 'select chest,' an ark containing the most precious part of his literary treasures. This chest — the poet may have seen such an one in several museums — was stained and rendered proof against the attacks of insects by being rubbed with turpentine, was covered with hair cloth, and had on its front the *Xi*, since it had been given him by a relative named Xanthus 'now at peace.' Two other letters seem to have been on the chest. These were the initials of his own names, or perhaps the first and last letters of his ordinary name. This name he will not state, but instead of it signs his note with a cross, 'to show I wait his coming with the rest.' Why he withheld his name, we are left to conjecture; probably it was humility, since there is one Name that is above every name and alone worthy to be held in remembrance. There is throughout a remarkable reticence as to names: even St. John is not here distinctly called so. The intensely real religious tone



— the spirit of primitive Christianity — is heard and felt in the minutest details of the poem.”

The sixty-eight lines, from line 41 to line eighty-one, are descriptive and narrative, and relate what happened in the desert cave before the apostle began the great discourse in uttering which he died.

**St. John in the Desert.**

An edict had been issued in the time of Trajan, A. D. 98–117, ordering the seizure and death of all Christians, and when tidings of this edict reached Ephesus, Pamphylax himself, with Xanthus (a kinsman of the owner of the manuscript) and another Christian, called Valens, assisted by a strong Bactrian convert and a Christian boy, bore the aged and dying apostle off to a place of safety in the desert, where he lingered on for sixty days.

The place of retreat is fully described. It is a cave in a sandy plain. There are three compartments in the cave, the most interior admitting no light, and the “midmost grotto” a few straggling rays at noontide. Into this “midmost grotto” St. John’s loving attendants, feeling that his death is imminent, now bear him, that he may die in the light. The picture of the dying apostle amid the group of faithful followers is most touching:

“ ‘Here is wine,’ answered Xanthus — dropped a drop;  
I stooped and placed the lap of cloth aright,  
Then chafed his right hand, and the Boy his left:

But Valens had bethought him, and produced  
 And broke a ball of nard and made perfume.  
 Only he did — not so much wake, as — turn  
*And smile a little as a sleeper does*  
*If any dear one call him, touch his face*  
*And smiles and loves, but will not be disturbed.*  
 Then Xanthus said a prayer, but still he slept;  
 (It is the Xanthus that escaped to Rome,  
 Was burned and could not write the Chronicle)  
 Then the Boy sprang up from his knees and ran  
*Stung by the splendor of a sudden thought,*  
 And fetched the seventh plate of graven lead  
 Out of the secret chamber, found a place,  
 Pressing with finger on the deeper dints,  
 And spoke, as 't were his mouth proclaiming first  
*'I am the Resurrection and the Life.'*"

Beginning with line eighty-two, the writer of  
 the manuscript adds a note professing to give a gloss or interpretation of a  
 passage in St. John's own writings:

**The Three  
 Souls: What  
 Does, What  
 Knows,  
 What Is.**

"[This is the doctrine he was wont to teach,  
 How divers persons witness in each man,  
 Three souls which make up one soul: first, to wit,  
 A soul of each and all the bodily parts,  
 Seated therein, which works, and is What Does,  
 And has the use of Earth, and ends the man  
 Downward: but tending upward for advice,  
 Grows into and again is grown into  
 By the next soul, which, seated in the brain,  
 Useth the first with its collected use,  
 And feeleth, thinketh, willeth, — is What Knows:

Which duly tending upward in its turn,  
 Grows into and again is grown into  
 By the last soul, that uses both the first,  
 Subsisting whether they assist or no,  
 And constituting man's self, is What Is —  
 And leans upon the former, makes it play  
 As that played off the first : and tending up,  
 Holds, is upheld, by God, and ends the man  
 Upward in that dread point of intercourse,  
 Nor needs a place, for it returns to Him,  
 What Does, What Knows, What Is ; three souls, one man.]”

According to Browning this curious gloss or commentary (of Theotypas, an imaginary personage) supplies an explanation of the spiritual and subjective character of St. John's faith. The doctrine set forth in this strange passage seems to have in it something of Plato's idea of the Three Souls in each man — the Vegetative, the Sensitive or Active, and the Intellectual. Of course there can be no division of the human soul. Its unity is insisted upon by all Catholic philosophers ; and Dante, whose philosophy is the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, testifies to —

. . . *un' alma sola*  
*Che vive e sente e se in se rigira.*

“ . . . one only soul  
 Which lives, and feels, and on itself revolves.”

Browning's whole purport in this poem, “A Death in the Desert,” is to diminish the importance

of history and tradition as witness and proof of the divine origin of Christianity, and fall back upon the *Love and Knowledge* which Christ left to mankind as enduring evidences of His divinity. And shall man now, when he has gained such love and knowledge, doubt their very source?

The General  
Purport of "A  
Death in the  
Desert."

"I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ,  
Accepted by thy reason, *solves for thee*  
*All questions in the earth and out of it,*  
*And has so far advanced thee to be wise.*  
Wouldst thou unprove this to re-prove the proved?  
In life's mere minute. with power to use that proof,  
Leave knowledge and revert to how it sprung?  
*Thou hast it; use it and forthwith or die!*"

In this poem, "A Death in the Desert," Brown-  
ing truthfully represents St. John as especially the  
teacher of love. As St. Paul is the teacher of faith and Christian philo-  
sophy so is St. John the herald of Love  
Divine. It was Love, as the essence of the gospel,  
that filled the apostle's mind:

The Personal-  
ity and  
Character  
of St. John.

"Such ever was love's way: to rise, it stoops.  
Since I, whom Christ's mouth taught, was bidden teach,  
I went, for many years, about the world,  
Saying 'It was so; so I heard and saw.'  
Speaking as the case asked: and men believed.  
Afterwards came the message to myself  
In Patmos isle; I was not bidden teach,

But simply listen, take a book and write,  
 Nor set down other than the given word,  
 With nothing left to my arbitrament  
 To choose or change : I wrote and men believed."

Two words are used in the Latin Vulgate to express Christ's love for St. John, — *diligebat* and *amabat*, the latter word marking a personal affection. It is evident that Browning, believed in the Divine inspiration under which St. John wrote his Gospel, as he makes the apostle say :

"What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars.

*Guarded and guided still to see and speak."*

We find at the end of St. John's discourse an epitome of Browning's religious faith as expressed in a number of his poems. Summed up, we find this faith contained in the lines :

**Browning's  
Religious  
Faith as set  
forth in the  
Poem.**

"A man's reach should exceed his grasp  
 Or what's a heaven for?"

According to Browning, man's life consists in never-ceasing progress. "The godlike power is imparted to him gradually, and step by step he approaches nearer to absolute truth — to divine perfection." He was made —

"Lower than God who knows all and can all,  
 Higher than beasts which know and can, so far

As each beast's limit, perfect to an end,  
Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more ;  
While man knows partly, but conceives beside,  
Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,  
And in this striving, this converting air  
Into a solid he may grasp and use,  
Finds *progress, man's distinctive mark alone,*  
*Not God's and not the beasts' : God is, they are, —*  
*Man partly is and wholly hopes to be."*

Should man cease to strive, and renounce the  
divine ideals, he brings upon himself the condem-  
nation of death :

"If ye demur, this judgment on your head,  
Never to reach the ultimate, angel's law,  
Indulging every instinct of the soul  
There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing!"

This strong and noble poem is studded with  
beautiful passages. Perhaps the finest of these  
is where the apostle, in prophetic **A Passage of**  
vision, looks down the avenues of **Rare Beauty.**  
time and beholds the disciples of Christ ponder-  
ing and discoursing in divers lands of the things  
which he had taught and written :

"I see you stand conversing, each new face,  
Either in fields of yellow summer eves,  
On islets yet unnamed amid the sea ;  
Or pace for shelter 'neath a portico  
Out of the crowd in some enormous town  
Where now the lark sings in a solitude ;  
Or muse upon blank heaps of stone and sand  
Idly conjectured to be Ephesus."

## QUESTIONS.

1. What is Browning's method of introducing his subject?
2. What is necessary to catch the connection and antecedents of his thought and to understand Browning fully?
3. What reason did Browning give upon being questioned why he did not popularize the study of his poems?
4. Name Browning's four religious poems, and explain their kinship.
5. How does Browning exemplify the various stages of religious belief?
6. What determined the form of "A Death in the Desert"?
7. What reason have we to suppose that Browning had no sympathy with the German sceptical philosophers, Strauss and others?
8. What did these sceptics affirm regarding the Gospel of St. John?
9. How may we obtain some definite idea of "A Death in the Desert"?
10. What is the meaning of this poem? Explain the Prologue.
11. Relate Browning's description of St. John in the desert — line thirteen to line eighty-one.
12. What, according to Browning, supplies an explanation of the spiritual and subjective character of St. John's faith?
13. What is the general import of "A Death in the Desert"?

**"A DEATH IN THE DESERT" 37**

14. How does Browning in his poem represent the character and personality of St. John?

15. What was Browning's religious faith as set forth in the poem?

16. Indicate some of the most beautiful passages in the poem.



## MRS. BROWNING'S "SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE."

LOVE has ever been a fitting theme for the sonneteer, from Spenser to Rossetti. Enshrined in this art-form the poet has poured out his tide of love and tenderly confessed to the passionate emotions of his heart. Fourteen iambic lines and the confession is made! The one idea, the one sentiment, reigns supreme. The sestet crowns the octave. The thought must be gathered up intense, not weakened by diffusion.

How suitable, then, is not the sonnet as a vehicle of the loftiest thoughts as well as the tenderest and most impassioned emotions! The vernacular of love is clear and direct — just what the sonnet must be. It burns and blazes as a star, transfiguring the whole world around; the sonnet must be luminous, too, lighting up with its beams the world of thought embodied within its lines.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the greatest woman poet of any age, has given us a cycle of sonnets, known under the title of "Sonnets from the Portuguese," which contain some of the finest subjective poetry to

**Love and the  
Sonnet.**

**Mrs. Brown-  
ing's Cycle of  
Sonnets.**



*Elizabeth Barrett Browning*



be found in English literature. "Their form reminds us," says Stedman, "of an English prototype, and it is no sacrilege to say that their music is showered from a higher and purer atmosphere than that of the Swan of Avon. We need not enter upon cold comparison of their respective excellences; but Shakespeare's personal poems were the overflow of his impetuous youth: his broader vision, that took a world within its ken, was absolutely objective; while Mrs. Browning's Love Sonnets are the outpourings of a woman's tenderest emotions at an epoch when her art was most mature, and her whole nature exalted by a passion that to such a being comes but once and for all. Here indeed the singer rose to her height. Here she is absorbed in rapturous utterance, radiant and triumphant with her own joy. The mists have risen and her sight is clear. Her mouthing and affectation are forgotten, her lips cease to stammer, the lyrical spirit has full control. The sonnet, artificial in weaker hands, becomes swift with feeling, red with a 'veined humanity,' the chosen vehicle of a royal woman's vows."

The history of how the "Sonnets from the Portuguese" came to be written has been given to the world. They are the notes and chronicle of Mrs. Browning's betrothal. Mr. Browning little sus-

How the  
"Sonnets from  
the Portu-  
guese" Came  
to be Written.

pected that the circumstances of their betrothal had led Miss Barrett into any artistic expression of feeling. During the months of their brief courtship neither poet showed any verses to the other.

After a honeymoon spent in Paris, Browning and his young wife took up their residence in Pisa, each pursuing his or her own literary work. One day early in 1847, Mrs. Browning came downstairs from her literary study and pushing a packet of papers into Browning's pocket told him to read it, and to tear it up if he did not like it; and then she fled again to her own room.

This parcel contained the series of sonnets which have rendered the name of Mrs. Browning illustrious. These sonnets were first published in the volumes of 1850, and in order to veil their true authorship it was agreed, at the suggestion of Browning, that they should appear under the title of "Sonnets from the Portuguese."

Spenser, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Rossetti — each has given us a deliberate set of sonnets,

**Mrs. Brown-  
ing and  
other Great  
Sonneteers.**

but it is not too much to say that Mrs. Browning's cycle of love poems excels the work of these four masters.

Of course, strictly speaking, these forty-four exquisite sonnets of Mrs. Browning's are not sonnets at all. It is true they are built after the Petrarchan model, but with the exception of the first, fourth,

"SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE" 41

and thirteenth, they cannot be said to realize with any distinctness the idea and the peculiar artistic effect of the sonnet proper.

As a critic points out, the natural bent of Mrs. Browning was certainly not to the sonnet. She was too dithyrambic, too tumultuous to be willingly restrained within a rigid form of verse. One of the earliest sonnets of her mature years is entitled "The Soul's Expression," and it is interesting as a revelation of her own consciousness of the difficulties which technical art presented to her:

"With stammering lips and insufficient sound  
I strive and struggle to deliver right  
That music of my nature, day and night  
With dream and thought and feeling interwound,  
And inly answering all the senses round  
With octaves of a mystic depth and height  
Which step out grandly to the infinite  
From the dark edges of the sensual ground!  
This song of soul I struggle to outbear  
Through portals of the sense, sublime and whole,  
And utter all myself into the air.  
But if I did it as the thunder-roll  
Breaks its own cloud, my flesh would perish there,  
Before that dread apocalypse of soul."

A study of the sonnet will reveal the fact that the sonnet architecture of Petrarch, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth, widely differ. The Italian is generally

**The Characteristics of a Good Sonnet.**

taken as the normal type, but it would be folly to say that, because a sonnet is not fashioned after the Italian type, therefore it should not be regarded as a sonnet proper. Speaking of this deviation from the normal type, Mark Pattison says: "How far any given specimen may deviate from type without ceasing to be a sonnet is as impossible to decide as it is in botany to draw the line between a variety and a distinct species. Perhaps we may say that success is the best test, and that a brilliant example justifies its own structural form. Or we may look for legislative sanction in consent, and demand compliance with those rules which the majority of poets agree to respect. The mighty masters are a law unto themselves and the validity of their legislation will be attested and held against all comers by the splendour of an unchangeable success."

We came across the following wise bit on the sonnet not long ago, and we think it strikes off fairly well the chief characteristics of a good sonnet:

"A sonnet should be grave, but not heavy. It must have a severity tempered by sweetness, like the breviary character of the Venerable Bede. It must linger meditatively; it must not loiter or fumble with its meaning. It must be sinuous, never headlong; feeling its rhymes delicately, not

"SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE" 43

falling upon them; for these are less rhymes than the most prominent of many assonances upon all of which the rhythm hangs."

It will be interesting for the student to take a Petrarchan sonnet, a Shakespearean sonnet, and a Wordsworthian sonnet, and note the difference in their architecture. Perhaps the great difference between the English and Italian sonnet is to be found in the fact that in the English sonnet the sense flows on without break from the octave into the sestet; whereas the Italian sonnet is required at the end of the octave to have a complete change in the idea. So that while the form of a sonnet may be Italian, the progress of the idea it embodies may be English.

Italian and  
English Types  
of the Sonnet.

The rhyme-schemes of the three chief types of Italian sonnets are the following: Type I., abbaabba cdecde. Type II., abbaabba cdcded. Type III., abbaabba cdedce.

A few of the finest sonnets in the English language are: Wordsworth's "The World is too much with us"; Longfellow's "Sonnet on Nature"; Byron's "Sonnet on Chillon"; Keats' "On Looking into Chapman's Homer"; and Shakespeare's "Shall I Compare thee to a Summer's Day?"

Dante Gabriel Rossetti has given us a wonder-



fully fine cycle of sonnets in his "House of Life."

Rossetti's  
Sonnet on a  
Sonnet.

His introductory sonnet on the Sonnet is very fine and is worthy of reproduction here:

" A sonnet is a moment's monument, —  
Memorial from the Soul's eternity  
To one dead deathless hour. Look that it be,  
Whether for lustral rite or dire portent,  
Of its own arduous fulness reverent:  
Carve it in ivory or in ebony,  
As Day or Night may rule; and let Time see  
Its flowering crest impearled and orient.  
A sonnet is a coin: its face reveals  
The soul, — its converse to what Power 't is due: —  
Whether for tribute to the august appeals  
Of Life, or dower in Love's high retinue  
It serve; or, 'mid the dark wharf's cavernous breath,  
In Charon's palm it pay the toll to Death "

A key to the central idea which informs this cycle of sonnets is found in the opening sonnet.

The Central  
Idea in "Son-  
nets from the  
Portuguese."

It is "an overture containing the motive of the canticle; 'not Death but Love' had seized her unaware." Laughing Love has invaded her sequestered chamber:

" I thought once how Theocritus had sung  
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,  
Who each one in a gracious hand appears  
To bear a gift for mortals old or young;  
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue;  
I saw in gradual vision, through my tears,

"SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE" 45

The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,  
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung  
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,  
So weeping, how a mystic shape did move  
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair ;  
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,  
' Guess now who holds thee ?' — ' Death,' I said. But there  
The silver answer rang, ' Not Death but Love.' "

In the fifth sonnet there is a beautiful piece of imagery. It is that in which Mrs. Browning likens herself to Electra pouring her sepulchral urn and all its ashes at the feet of Love.

Between sonnets five and six the student should read Mrs. Browning's little poem " Question and Answer." It belongs to the same orbit of thought and emotion and is co-radical with " Sonnets from the Portuguese." Here it is :

" Love you seek for presupposes  
Summer heat and sunny glow.  
Tell me, do you find moss-roses  
Budding, blooming in the snow ?  
Snow might kill the rose-tree's root :  
Shake it quickly from your foot,  
Lest it harm you as you go.

From the ivy where it dapples  
A gray ruin, stone by stone,  
Do you look for grapes or apples  
Or for sad green leaves alone ?  
Pluck the leaves off, two or three ;  
Keep them for morality  
When you shall be safe and gone."

In the tenth sonnet Mrs. Browning makes full confession of her love :

“ And when I say at need  
*I love thee . . . mark ! . . . I love thee* — in thy sight  
I stand transfigured, glorified aright,  
With conscience of the new rays that proceed  
Out of my face towards thine.”

From this point forward the sonnets play in their exquisite masque as if to celestial dance music with the wild thoughts and tremulous frolics of accepted love.

In the fourteenth sonnet Mrs. Browning pleads that Browning may not love her for her desert's sake, but for love's sake :

“ If thou must love me let it be for naught  
Except for love's sake only. Do not say  
' I love her for her smile, her look, her way  
Of speaking gently, for a trick of thought  
That falls in well with mine and certes brought  
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day ; '  
For these things in themselves beloved may  
Be changed, or change for thee : and love so wrought  
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for  
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry :  
A creature might forget to weep, who bore  
Thy comfort long and lose thy love thereby.  
But love me for love's sake that evermore  
Thou mayst love on through love's eternity.”

1  
"SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE" 47

At the end of the eighteenth sonnet the following little lyric "Inclusions" should be inserted — it is really a part of the sonnets:

"Oh, wilt thou have my hand, dear, to lie along in thine?  
As a little stone in a running stream, it seems to lie and  
pine.

Now drop the poor, pale hand, dear, unfit to plight with  
thine.

"Oh, wilt thou have my cheek, dear, drawn closer to thine  
own?

My cheek is white, my cheek is worn by many a tear run  
down.

Now leave a little space, dear, lest it should wet thine own.

"Oh, must thou have my soul, dear, commingled with thy  
soul?

Red grows the cheek and warm the hand; the part is in the  
whole:

Nor hands nor cheeks keep separate when soul is joined to  
soul."

It will be noticed that these sonnets are not heaped together in accidental sequence as Spenser's and Shakespeare's seem to be, but are arranged historically. They move along from the first surprise of unexpected passion to the final complete resignation of soul and body in a rapture which is to be sanctified and heightened by death itself.

Though all these sonnets exhibit the rhyme-

Their Historical  
Arrangement.

scheme of the Italian type of sonnet, — that is, abbaabba cdedcd, — they are not organically sonnets. As Professor Corson points out, in their rhyme-schemes they take on the exterior semblance of what organically they are not. The whole cycle is a beautiful casket of gems, full of lyrical splendor, deeply inlaid with the rubies and diamonds of a woman's purest and truest love.

The key-note of Mrs. Browning as an artist was sincerity. This is the quality which holds together the edifice of her style. Her nature was intense. When love invaded the chamber of her heart she hearkened to its whisperings, left her polar region of dreams, solitude, and introspection, and lived in the arms of her newborn world of thought. The long closed tideways of her woman's heart were opened and Love's torrent swept all before it.

"Sonnets from the Portuguese" are a record, a chronicle, of the genesis of love in the pure and noble heart of the world's great priestess of song. They not only chronicle every heart-beat of her love, but reflect the strength of her genius as an artist.

It is peculiarly true that women poets rarely, if ever, take us into their confidence when they deal

**How Far  
"Sonnets  
from the Por-  
tuguese" Re-  
flect the  
Genius of Mrs.  
Browning.**

"SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE" 49

with love. A natural delicacy leads them to write of love so platonically or so obscurely that it is difficult at times to know just what they wish to communicate. There is no doubting the meaning of Mrs. Browning in her "Sonnets from the Portuguese." Her "song of soul" is clear, and delivered with no stammering lips. The burden of her heart is love, and this she clothes with a technical beauty and sincerity that glorify the heart of woman.

Before Robert Browning achieved eminence as a poet, Tennyson and Mrs. Browning were the obvious inheritors of Wordsworth's throne. The two volumes of 1844 lifted Mrs. Browning at once to a place among the living poets of her country. Tennyson's great elegy, "In Memoriam," which is devoted to the analysis of philosophic grief, was published about the same time that Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese" appeared. There is a certain analogy between the two poems — one dealing with grief the other with love. "In Memoriam" is the record of a great friendship. "Sonnets from the Portuguese," one of the acknowledged glories of our literature, is built patiently and unquestionably on the union in stainless harmony of two of the most distinguished spirits which our century has produced.

"Sonnets from the Portuguese" and "In Memoriam" contrasted.

## QUESTIONS.

1. Define the sonnet.
2. Why is the sonnet suitable as a form of verse to express the emotions of love?
2. What is Mrs. Browning's place among the women poets of the world?
4. What, in brief, is Stedman's appreciation of Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese"?
5. Relate how these sonnets came to be written.
6. Contrast the sonnets of Mrs. Browning with the sonnets of Spenser, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Rossetti.
7. Should "Sonnets from the Portuguese," be really designated sonnets?
8. What are the characteristics of a good sonnet?
9. Explain the difference between the Italian and English types of the sonnet.
10. What is the central idea in "Sonnets from the Portuguese"?
11. Are these sonnets heaped together in accidental sequence?
12. Are these poems organically sonnets?
13. What was the keynote of Mrs. Browning as an artist?
14. How far do these sonnets reflect the genius of Mrs. Browning?
15. Contrast "In Memoriam" and "Sonnets from the Portuguese."

7

rm of verse to  
ng the women  
iation of Mrs.  
" ?  
written.  
ing with the  
sworth, and  
e," be really  
onnet?  
Italian and  
s from the  
accidental  
ning as an  
genius of  
s from the



*Wm Lloyd Garrison*





## WORDSWORTH'S ODE "ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY."

WORDSWORTH'S ode "On Intimations of Immortality" is, perhaps, the most organic poem to be found in the whole range of English literature. It is, indeed, an embodiment of the happiest and truest inspiration. The idea and matter in the ode so interpenetrate — are so fused — and the poet's individuality becomes so absorbed in the creation of his imagination, that a Wordsworthian poem of rare power and vital beauty is the result.

**An Organic  
Poem.**

Where there is a lack of true inspiration this organic character in a poem will be wanting, and the idea will seem to stand above the matter as a master above a slave. The absence, too, of that sacred flame which fuses and fashions the precious ore of poetic thought with its unifying power, will affect the organic character of a poem not only on its thought side, but also on its metrical side.

Wordsworth's "Ode to Immortality" is a most vital creation and represents the genius of Wordsworth at its very best. It is the embodiment of

**UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR LIBRARY**

the poet's own mystical ideality, and may be justly regarded as the crowning effort of modern imaginative discourse. Emerson calls it the high-water mark of English thought in the nineteenth century, and Principal Shairp says that it marks the highest limit which the tide of poetic inspiration has reached in England within this century, or, indeed, since the days of Milton.

Of this poem, "Ode on Intimations of Immortality," published in 1807, Wordsworth wrote as follows in 1843, explanatory of its genesis and import:

Wordsworth's  
Explanation  
of its Origin  
and Import.

"This was composed during my residence at Town End, Grasmere. Two years at least passed between the writing of the first four stanzas and the remaining part. To the attentive and competent reader, the whole sufficiently explains itself; but there may be no harm in adverting here to particular feelings or *experiences* of my own mind on which the structure of the poem partly rests. Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being. I have said elsewhere:

"A simple child,  
That lightly draws its breath,  
And feels its life in every limb,  
What should it know of death!"

"But it was not so much from feelings of animal vivacity that *my* difficulty came as from a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within me. I used to brood over the stories of Enoch and Elijah, and almost to persuade myself that, whatever might become of others, I should be translated in something of the same way to heaven. With a feeling congenial to this I was *often* unable to think of eternal things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature.

"Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to reality. At that time I was afraid of such processes. In later periods of life I have deplored, as we all have reason to do, a subjugation of an opposite character, and have rejoiced over the remembrances as is expressed in the lines:

"Obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things,  
Fallings from us, vanishings,' etc.

"To that dream-like vividness and splendour which invest objects of sight in childhood, every one, I believe, if he would look back, could bear testimony, and I need not dwell upon it here; but having in the poem regarded it as presumptive

evidence of a prior state of existence, I think it right to protest against a conclusion which has given pain to some good and pious persons, that I meant to inculcate such a belief. It is far too shadowy a notion to be recommended to faith as more than an element in our instincts of immortality.

"But let us bear in mind that, though the idea is not advanced in revelation, there is nothing there to contradict it, and the fall of man presents an analogy in its favor. Accordingly, a pre-existent state has entered into the popular creeds of many nations, and among all persons acquainted with classic literature is known as an ingredient in Platonic philosophy.

"Archimedes said that he could move the world if he had a point whereon to rest his machine. Who has not felt the aspirations as regards the world of his own mind? Having to wield some of its elements when I was impelled to write this poem on the 'Immortality of the Soul,' I took hold of the notion of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorizing me to make for my purpose the best use of it I could as a poet."

The germ, or shall we call it main idea of this  
**Its Germ in** ode will be found in a fine poem by Henry  
**Literature.** Vaughan, a Platonic poet of the seven-

"ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY" 55

teenth century. The poem is entitled "The Retreat." Here is the passage which embodies the germ :

"Happy those early days when I  
Shin'd in my angel-infancy !  
Before I understood this place  
Appointed for my second race,  
Or taught my soul to fancy aught  
But a white, celestial thought ;  
When yet I had not walked above  
A mile or two from my first love,  
And looking back — at that short space —  
Could see a glimpse of his bright face ;  
When on some gilded cloud or flower  
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,  
And in those weaker glories spy  
Some shadows of eternity :  
Before I taught my tongue to wound  
My conscience with a sinful sound,  
Or had the black art to dispense  
A sev'ral sin to ev'ry sense,  
But felt through all this fleshly dress  
Bright shoots of everlastingness."

Again in our later poets we find hints and glints of the informing idea in this poem. Shelley in his "Lament" touches it:

"O world! O life! O time!  
On whose last steps I climb,  
Trembling at that whereon I stood before —  
When will return the glory of your prime?  
No more—oh, never more!"

Hood, in his poem "I remember, I remember," embodies a thought also kindred to this:

"I remember, I remember,  
The fir trees dark and high;  
I used to think their slender tops  
Were close against the sky.  
It was a childish ignorance,  
But now 't is little joy  
To know I 'm farther off from heav'n  
Than when I was a boy."

In structure this great ode stands alone, being modelled on no other poem. Its rhythm, metre, rhyme, melody, harmony, and stanza, *Its Technique.* are vital and organic, — the outcome of the unifying, or what Coleridge terms the *esemplastic* power, of the feeling or emotion embodied in the poem. It should be remembered that poetic unities — metre, melody, rhythm, etc. — are not accidents or things apart from the life of a poem, but are inherent and contained in the divine energy of the art work.

The "Ode on Immortality" contains eleven stanzas of varied mould, dependent upon the character of the sentiment poetically enshrouded. It will be noticed that not only is the metre of this fine ode singularly appropriate, but its diction is equally felicitous. Had its stanzas been fashioned successively, in regular form, such structure would

have proved particularly suitable for the expression of definite thought; but the irregular yields itself more pliantly to the imaginative passion which is of the very life, atmosphere, and essence of this poem.

Referring to the structure and diction of the "Ode on Immortality," Aubrey de Vere says: "Parts of it are written in that 'large utterance,' at once majestic and simple, which makes so much of Wordsworth's poetry, when once read, haunt the ear forever. Parts of it are familiar even to roughness. That roughness was intentional and was not mitigated in the later editions. It was needed. The perfection of a poem may be gravely impaired by its uniform elaborateness; as in architecture ornament becomes offensive if it be not relieved by contrasted masses of occasional plainness or rudeness. Without such passages the sentiment of this ode would have lacked its passionate impulse, and its doctrine would have been frozen into a scholastic theory. In this poem many extremes are reconciled. In no other has Wordsworth's genius, contemplative at once and emotional, moved through so wide an arc."

Of the two hundred and three verses which make up the ode, the metre of one hundred is iambic pentameter. This is the theme-metre of the ode — indeed, it is the measure in which the



greatest portion of English poetry is written. Of the other metres in the poem there are thirty-nine 4xa, forty-four 3xa, ten 2xa, six 6xa, one 7xa, one 2xxa plus x, one xxa, xa, xxa, xa, and one 3xa, ax, xa, — *a* representing in every case, according to Latham's method of metrical notation, an accented syllable, and *x* an unaccented syllable.

It will further be observed that the more reflective portions of the ode are expressed in the theme-metre — good examples being found in the eighth and eleventh stanzas. Where the thought is light and gay and gladsome, as in the tenth stanza, the notes are set to a shorter metre.

The third stanza contains a greater variety of metre than any other section of the ode. Notice how the music of the verses in their varied form serves as a chorus to the thought, expressing a mystic sympathy with it; and notice, too, the exultant note attained in the last verse through the sweeping close imparted by the iambic heptameter (7xa).

Again, it would be well for the student to note the rhyme-scheme, followed with the varying degrees of emphasis imparted, according to the nearness or remoteness of the rhyme.

There are two marked and well defined transitions in the thought of the poem — between the fourth and fifth, and eighth

Three Divisions  
of the Poem.

"ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY" 59

and ninth stanzas. The first four stanzas deal with a loss which has saddened a soul once self-sufficing; the next four are devoted to a vindication of the daring doctrine of the poem without trenching upon polemics; while the concluding stanzas of the poem restore to the soul peace through the thought that the spiritual vision, cut off by the temporal things around, may be regained and the melancholy fear subdued by a return to the simple ways in which our childhood walked.

In the first division of the poem is set forth the experience of our common humanity. In the first stanza the poet recalls his childhood, when all nature seemed to him to be clothed in celestial light; but now that he has reached the years of manhood this celestial light has given place to a more prosaic aspect in nature. In the next stanza — a piece of matchless description — there is revealed to him the fact that nature is still beautiful and fair in its varied phenomena; still he knows, realizes, that a glory has departed from the earth, — a glory which belonged to the vision of his childhood. In the third and fourth stanzas the poet mingles in the great festival of nature. He hears the echoes from the mountain throng, and the winds come to him from the fields of sleep, but amidst this jubilee grief is borne in upon him through a single tree, a single

**The Thought  
in the First  
Division.**

field, which speaks to him of something that is gone. The little pansy at his feet repeats the self-same tale.

The thought in the second division contains the argument of the poem. It sets forth the fact that

**The Thought  
in the Second  
Division.**

this earthly life is nothing more than a sleep, or a forgetting, in the midst of the larger life of Eternity; that when man is born he brings with him recollections of the glory he has left behind him, and as he grows to manhood the remembrance becomes dimmer, until at length the grown man sees the sunrise glory fade away into the light of common day.

The close of the first division is marked by sadness — gloom :

“ Whither is fled the visionary gleam ?  
Where is it now, the glory and the dream ? ”

The second division opens in hope and light. As Aubrey de Vere says, “ A hundred bygone musings have rushed to a single conclusion, and the problem is solved. Sharply, definitely, and with nothing of preface, the thought which has wrought deliverance is enunciated. The loss was even greater than it seemed to be ; but in its very greatness there lives a secret hope. It was not the loss of that gleam which beautified this earth : it was the loss of a whole world, but of one that cannot

"ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY" 61

be lost forever. We have a higher birthplace than we know; and our sorrow is itself a prophecy that the exile shall return to his country."

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing boy,  
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
He sees it in his joy;  
The youth, who daily farther from the East  
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,  
And by the vision splendid  
Is on his way attended;  
At length the man perceives it die away,  
And fade into the light of common day."

The succeeding three stanzas of the second division illustrate how the soul is gradually beguiled into a temporary forgetfulness of its celestial origin. The earth, his foster-mother, with a sort of cruel kindness does everything in her power to make him forget "that imperial palace whence he came." Environed by the moving pageantry of life "the little actor cons another part, descends from his

being's height," and wears the yoke which life and custom place upon his neck.

In the seventh stanza is set forth the life of man from childhood to old age. It is practically Shakespeare's "Seven Ages of Man," as found in "As You Like It," Act II.; Scene 1: "All the world's a stage," etc.

The last stanza of the second division is probably more difficult of interpretation than any other section of the poem. Stopford Brooke, we think, lays bare its meaning very clearly in the following comment:

"We can only catch the main idea among expressions of the child, as the "best philosopher" the "eye among the blind," "mighty prophet," "seer blest," — expressions which taken separately have scarcely any recognizable meaning. By taking them all together we feel, rather than see, that Wordsworth intended to say that the child, having lately come from a perfect existence, in which he saw truth directly and was at home with God, retains, unknown to us, that vision — and because he does, is the best philosopher, since he sees at once that which we through philosophy are endeavoring to reach; is the mighty prophet because in his actions and speech he tells unconsciously the truths he sees, but the sight of which we have lost; is more closely haunted by God,

"ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY" 63

more near to the immortal life, more purely and brightly free, because he half shares in the pre-existent life and glory out of which he has come."

The third division indicates the use of the change, and shows how it reacts upon the earlier disposition of the mind and tends to deepen the meaning of the first intimations of immortality. Man preserves through life a memory of his first estate. The obstinate questionings of sense and outward things make him but conscious of his own finiteness and the infinity towards which he is going, but which would not have been possible without his "shadowy recollections" of a time when he was intuitively conscious of an infinite from which he had come. He can never fully lose sight of this infinity — of the great "immortal sea" upon whose shores his childhood dreamed:

**The Thought  
in the Third  
Division.**

"Hence in a season of calm weather,  
Though inland far we be,  
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither;  
Can in a moment travel thither;  
And see the children sport upon the shore,  
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

In the fourth book of "The Excursion" there is a passage closely allied in thought to the above lines, beginning with —

" I have seen  
A curious child who dwelt upon a tract  
Of inland ground, applying to his ear  
The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell ; " etc.

Wordsworth regards the universe as a shell bespeaking communion with its native sea of God's Immensity and Omnipotence. The whole passage is very beautiful and very Wordsworthian in its thought and teaching.

The sublime ode which we are considering ends in a hymn of praise, a reconciliation with nature, which forms the subject of its opening lines. The spiritual passion which touched and stirred and tossed its beating heart has sunk at the close into a tranquillity which retains but a ripple of the storm beyond the harbor bar.

The estrangement of the poet from his loved nature is but for a brief season. She is still to him a very sacrament, bestowing upon him her spiritual gifts and graces—an intermediary between the source of all life and love and the heart of man :

" And O ye fountains, meadows, hills, and groves,  
Forbode not any severing of our loves !  
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might ;  
I only have relinquished ~~all~~ delight,  
To live beneath your more habitual sway.  
I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,

"ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY" 65

Even more than when I tripped lightly as they ;  
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day,  
Is lovely yet ;

The Clouds that gather round the setting sun  
Do take a sober coloring from an eye  
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality ;  
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.  
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears,  
To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

There is certainly a kinship between these two poems. "Ode to Immortality" is a great philosophic structure reared on "We are Seven." It embodies the child's feeling in "We are Seven" carried into the years of philosophic thought. "We are Seven," however, is not alone the mere tale of a little cottage girl who could not fully realize the meaning of death: it represents as well the poet's contemplative contrast between the natural health and joy of life in the living child and the supernatural secret of death:

"She had a rustic woodland air,  
And she was wildly clad :  
Her eyes were fair and very fair ;  
Her beauty made me glad."

It is worthy of noting, while discussing this poem, that the poetic moment or inspirational

"Ode to Immortality"  
and "We are Seven"  
Contrasted.



thought of the poem is to be found in the last stanza, which, by the way, Wordsworth tells us was composed first.

In the "Ode to Immortality" the poetic moment is to be found in the fifth stanza. It hints at, nay, embodies, the idea of the pre-natal existence of the soul. In "We are Seven" the child's feeling is horizoned by "this muddy vesture of clay" with no thought of the spirit tabernacled therein. In the "Ode to Immortality" this feeling touches the immortal threshold of philosophic thought and gains for the poet a faith, a trust, a hope —

" In the primal sympathy  
Which, having been, must ever be;  
In the soothing thoughts that spring  
Out of human suffering;  
*In the faith that looks through death,*  
In years that bring the philosophic mind."

In studying the "Ode to Immortality" it would be well for the student to compare it, (1) as to metrical form, (2) as to ethical teaching, and (3) as to æsthetic value, with the following four great odes: Coleridge's "France"; Gray's "Bard"; Tennyson's "Death of Wellington"; and Milton's "Nativity." Note the share which the poet as seer and singer has in the building up of an ode. Is Tennyson's "Death of Wellington" characterized by the same deep

Some Great  
Odes in Eng-  
lish Poetry  
Compared.

"ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY" 67

and rich thought, sublime conception, and inwrought truth as the "Ode to Immortality"? Is it not largely labored, and, as Stedman says, built up of high-sounding lines and refrains in which rhetoric is substituted for imagination and richness of thought? Gray's "Bard" is a Pindaric ode. Would you designate the "Ode to Immortality" or Coleridge's "France" or Milton's "Nativity" as a Pindaric ode? The "Bard" is considered to be a prophetic poem. Does this account for the obscurity which characterizes it? Note the manner in which each ode opens. Compare the five odes as to strength, uplift, loftiness of cast, organic mould, stanza, and rhyme-scheme. "The ode is a grand conception expressed in language of uniform dignity and often of great beauty." How far and how fully do the five odes embody this definition? Wherein do the opening and closing of Coleridge's "Ode to France" resemble the opening and closing of the "Ode to Immortality"? How far does each ode represent the special poetic characteristics of its author?

The "Ode to Immortality" is essentially a philosophical poem. It never, however, descends to the plane of mere argument, but keeps ever on the high ground of the essential identity of our childish instincts and our enlightened reason. The whole poem and its

**The Ethical  
Teaching of  
the "Ode to  
Immortality."**

meaning and intent may be summed up as follows: There is set before us in the first part of the poem an experience common to humanity. Then it is shown how the soul, step by step, becoming centred in the seen and the temporal, loses sight of the glory and beauty which were the dower of childhood. The ethical value of the poem is to be found in the closing stanzas, which set forth the fact that if we would regain the spiritual vision lost to us as our souls have travelled inland in life, far from "that immortal sea," we must become again as little children in this life of the soul, blending the early intuitions of our childhood with the mature reason of our manhood. The "Ode to Immortality" is generally regarded as Platonic in its philosophy, assigning as it does to mankind a life previous to their human one. There is, however, a difference in the teaching of the two: "With Wordsworth the infant, with Plato the philosopher approaches nearest to the previous more glorious state." It should be remembered too, that Wordsworth held to the teachings in this great poem with a poetic, not a religious faith.

#### QUESTIONS.

1. Why is Wordsworth's ode "On the Intimations of Immortality" claimed to be the most organic poem in English literature?

"ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY" 69

2. What does the "Ode to Immortality" represent?
3. What was the origin of this poem?
4. What is its import?
5. What is its informing idea?
6. Explain its literary structure.
7. Explain the three divisions of the poem.
8. What is the thought in the first division?
9. What is the thought in the second division?
10. What is the thought in the third division?
11. Explain the kinship between the "Ode to Immortality" and "We are Seven."
12. Compare the "Ode to Immortality" with other great odes in English literature.
13. What is the ethical teaching of the "Ode to Immortality"?

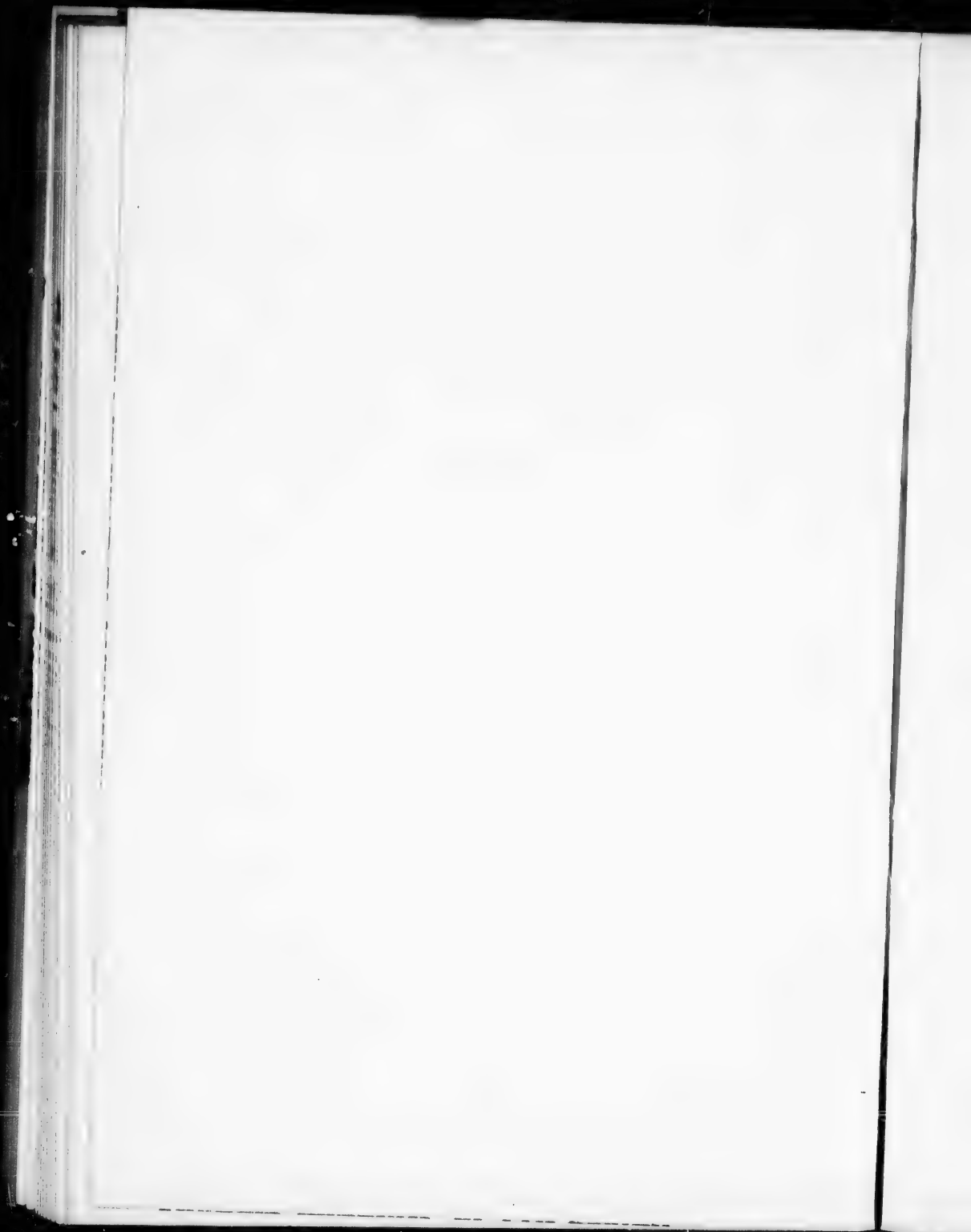
## COLERIDGE'S "ANCIENT MARINER."

A NEW gospel of poetry received proclamation at the close of the eighteenth century through the lips of Wordsworth and Coleridge, who led the heart of man back in pilgrimage to the shrine of nature, whose altar lamp had burned unheeded during the reign of the "correct school of poets." Burns and Goldsmith and Cowper and Thomson prepared the way. The new movement, which had contemporaneous cradling in Germany and France, and had touched and quickened the literary mind and spirit of England, found fullest and clearest expression in the ardent and reverent hearts of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. These gifted twain well represent the school of nature and romance in English poetry. They came with a message, a new gospel, to the literary world; and despite the lashes and stripes, the scorn and contempt of critics, this message, this gospel, they proclaimed to the literary sons of men.

A close, intimate, and abiding friendship sprang up between those two gifted minds, perhaps owing



*S. T. Coleridge*

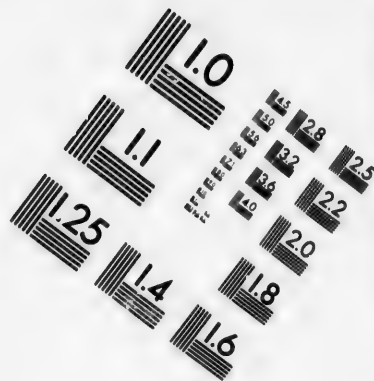
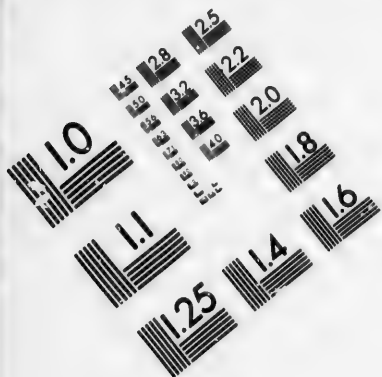


to the kinship of their genius. Coleridge first became acquainted with Wordsworth in 1794, and the two became neighbors in 1797. They formed just estimates of each other's powers and soon resolved to unite in a literary venture. They projected the "Lyrical Ballads," — a work which was destined to mark a momentous epoch in the history of English poetry. The purpose of the "Lyrical Ballads" was to illustrate "the two cardinal points of poetry: the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of the imagination." It was agreed that Wordsworth was to contribute poems on subjects chosen from every-day life, while on Coleridge's part "the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural, and the interest aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real." He was "to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of the imagination that willing suspension of disbelief which constitutes poetic faith." Coleridge's part of the joint volume, which appeared in 1798, virtually consisted of the "Ancient Mariner" alone.

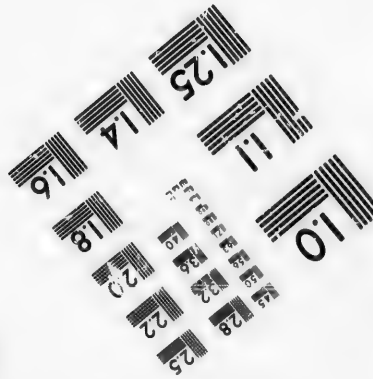
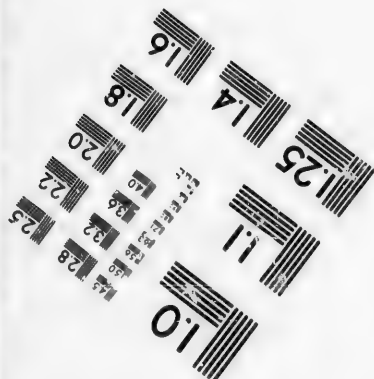
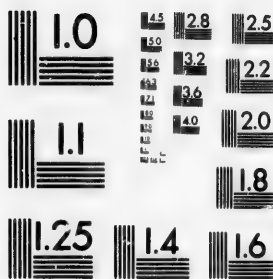
Wordsworth  
and Coleridge.







# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (MT-3)



Photographic  
Sciences  
Corporation

23 WEST MAIN STREET  
WEBSTER, N.Y. 14590  
(716) 872-4503



What was the purpose of Coleridge in writing the "Ancient Mariner"? Is the poem probable, and has it a moral? These are important questions, and should receive the attention of the student. Coleridge places as an introduction to his poem the following lines from Burnet, and they may lend some light to the purpose which the author had in building up this remarkable poem: "I have no difficulty in believing that there are more invisible than visible beings in the world. But who shall tell us the story of their whole family, and the rank, relationship, characteristics, and duties of each? How they act? Where they dwell? The mind of man has always striven for, but never attained, a knowledge of these things. Meanwhile I shall not deny that sometimes it is useful to view in a mental picture the image of a greater and better world, so that the intellect may not, through occupation with the petty concerns of daily life, become too narrow and be wholly absorbed in the consideration of trifles. But, nevertheless, we must watch over the truth and keep ourselves within bounds, in order to distinguish the certain from the doubtful, and day from night."

It seems quite clear, we think, that Coleridge's purpose in writing the "Ancient Mariner," which is, as Swinburne says, a very triumph of modern

poetry, was to show that God's love animates and binds together the whole world —

"For so the whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

— that every creature is a link in His love, and that he who wantonly destroys one of God's creatures cuts himself off from God's love. By the killing of the albatross the soul of the ancient mariner has been wrenched from the animating principle that linked it to the universe.

In Coleridge's "Table Talk" we find the following reference to the moral import of this poem: "Mrs. Barbauld once told me that she admired the 'Ancient Mariner' very much, but Its Ethical Teaching. that there were two faults in it, — it was improbable, and had no moral. As for the probability, I owned that it might admit some question; but as to the want of a moral, I told her that in my judgment the poem had too much; and that the only or chief fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination." Of course the moral is obviously contained in the third last stanza of the poem:

"He prayeth best who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us  
He made and loveth all."

The "Ancient Mariner" is an expression of divine love manifested through objects of nature.

Coleridge did much to restore the note of supernaturalism to English poetry. It is an element **Supernaturalism in the Poem.** which belongs especially to mediæval poets. Later in our century Dante Gabriel Rossetti introduced it, together with the temper of religious wonder. It was one of the outcomes of the romantic movement in English poetry, which Percy's "Reliques" did so much to foster. Scott employs it with good effect. In the preparation of the "Lyrical Ballads," Coleridge undertook the special romance of the work, and the blending of supernatural machinery with human interest. Hence the very life and atmosphere of the "Ancient Mariner" have root in the supernatural, — in fact, it is this which holds the poem together and gives it artistic unity as well as imaginative reach and scope.

Mrs. Oliphant contributes the following brief study or appreciation of the "Ancient Mariner." It **A Brief Study of the "Ancient Mariner."** may shed some light upon the student's path and make more clear the purpose, plan, and meaning of this very unique poem: "The life of every day is going on gayly; the wedding guests are close to the festal doors, when Mystery and Wonder suddenly interpose in the way, shutting out everything else around. The sounds of

the other existence are heard through them; and even by glimpses that life is visible, — the merry minstrels 'nodding their heads,' the bride in her blushes, — but the unwilling listener has entered into the shadow, and the unseen has got hold of him. It is a parable not only of the ship and the albatross (which is hard of interpretation) but of mankind, a stranger upon earth 'moving about in worlds not realized,' always subject to be seized by powers to which he is of kin, though he understands them not. 'There is more of the invisible than the visible in the world' is the poet's motto, and with a great splendor and force of imagination he enforces his text. 'There was a ship,' quoth he, and the weird vessel glides before the unwilling listener's eyes so that he can see nothing else. It comes between him and the feast, between him and the figures of his friends, which flit like ghosts out of the door. Which is the real, and which is the vision? The mind grows giddy and is unable to judge; and while everything tangible disappears, the unseen sweeps triumphantly in and holds possession more real, more true, more unquestionable than anything that eye can see.

"Throughout the poem this sentiment of isolation is preserved with a magical and most impressive reality. All the action is absolutely shut up within the doomed ship. The one man who is the

chronicler, and to whose fate everything refers, is never withdrawn from our attention for a moment. We grow silent with him, 'with throats unslaked, with black lips baked,' in a sympathy which is the very climax of poetic pain. And then what touches of tenderness are those which surprise us in the numbness and trance of awful solitude —

'O happy living things!' —

or this other which comes after the horror of the reanimated bodies, the ghastly crew of the dead-alive —

'For when it dawned . . .'

When the tale has reached its height of mystery and emotion a change ensues. Gradually the great spell is removed. As the voyage approaches its conclusion ordinary instrumentalities appear once more.

"This unexpected gentle conclusion brings our feet back to the common soil with a bewildered sweetness of relief and soft quiet after the prodigious strain of mental excitement, which is nothing like anything else we can remember in poetry. The effect is one rarely produced, and which few poets have the strength and daring to accomplish; sinking from the highest notes of spiritual music to the absolute simplicity of exhausted nature."

The "Ancient Mariner" is an allegory, and repre-



sents the emancipation of the human soul, through universal love, from the bonds of error and passion. It is a poem of great spiritual significance, but its ethical value, bound up mystically in its lines, is not its only worth. This truly organic poem should be studied through the artistic devices which the poet makes use of in the fashioning and upbuilding of the poem.

**Its Artistic  
Devices.**

For instance, in order to produce the impressions of extreme suffering and terror, Coleridge resorted to certain devices. First, he laid the scene of his tale at sea — "in a field of life which is nearest the primitive forces of nature. Again, the bare incidents of his tale, stripped of their vitality, are in themselves productive of horror and dread: the notions of agonized thirst, of stagnation under tropical heat, of confinement to a ship manned by the dead, and of utter loneliness under their wide-open, eternally accusing eyes." Perhaps the great artistic device employed by Coleridge is that of contrast, — contrast in color, sound, motion, and the larger narrative effects. This artistic device of contrast will be found in each of the seven sections of the poem.

There is a goodly mixture of archaic words in the "Ancient Mariner." These color the atmosphere of the poem and help to give it fit setting. In the picturesque power of

**A Word about  
its Diction.**

language, Coleridge excels. There is scarce anything in modern poetry to surpass in vividness and melody some portions of the "Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel." The words are full of song and sheen and color. They are more than a garment of the poetic thought — they throb and glow with the spirit itself.

In Part Second the stanzas descriptive of the entrance of the ship into the Pacific Ocean, and the becalming which ensued, are very fine:

Some  
Passages of  
Beauty and  
Splendor.

"The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,  
The furrow followed free:  
We were the first that ever burst  
Into that silent sea.

"Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,  
'T was sad as sad could be;  
And we did speak only to break  
The silence of the sea!

"All in a hot and copper sky  
The bloody sun, at noon,  
Right up above the mast did stand,  
No bigger than the moon.

"Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck — nor breath, nor motion;  
As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean."

## "ANCIENT MARINER"

79

Where again can be found sweeter poetic music than the following? —

"It ceased; yet still the sails made on  
A pleasant noise till noon,  
A noise like of a hidden brook  
In the leafy month of June,  
That to the sleeping woods all night  
Singeth a quiet tune."

Charles Algernon Swinburne is a supreme artist in technique, though lacking in the fuller endowment of poetic thought. His estimate of the "Ancient Mariner" is of value. Here it is: "This poem is beyond question one of the great triumphs of poetry. For the execution, I presume no human eye is too dull to see how perfect it is and how high in kind of perfection. Here is not the speckless and elaborate finish which shows everywhere the fresh rasp of file or chisel on its smooth and spruce excellence; this is faultless after the fashion of a flower or tree."

An Estimate  
of the  
"Ancient  
Mariner."

### QUESTIONS.

1. What is meant by the new gospel of poetry proclaimed by Wordsworth and Coleridge?
2. How were the writings of these two poets received by the critics?
3. What were the relations between Wordsworth and Coleridge?

UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR LIBRARY

4. In what literary venture did they unite?
5. What was the purpose of the "Lyrical Ballads"?
6. What was the character of the poems contributed by each of these two poets to the "Lyrical Ballads"?
7. What is the purpose and scope of the "Ancient Mariner"?
8. What is the ethical teaching of this poem?
9. How is the supernatural element manifested in the "Ancient Mariner"?
10. What is Mrs. Oliphant's appreciation of the "Ancient Mariner"?
11. Illustrate the artistic devices of the poem.
12. What may be said of the diction of this poem?
13. Quote a passage descriptive of the beauty and splendor of the poem.
14. What is Swinburne's estimate of the "Ancient Mariner"?

ads"?  
ributed  
"?  
ncient

in the

f the

n?  
y and

ncient



*Percy B Shelley.*



## SHELLEY'S "PROMETHEUS UNBOUND."

To understand Shelley's work, it is necessary to understand the poet's creed. Shelley was a democrat and a communist. "Prometheus <sup>Shelley's</sup> Unbound" is the supreme expression in <sup>Creed.</sup> imaginative form of that new democracy which found dynamic power in the Revolution of 1789.

Shelley held that the universe is penetrated, vitalized, by a spirit, and this spirit he sometimes designates as Nature, and again as something more than Life and Nature—as Love and Beauty. He believed that the true object of man was to adore this spirit, — to clasp it affectionately. We see this idea set forth in "Prometheus Unbound," for, according to Shelley, the final union of Prometheus with Asia is the consummation of human destinies.

Shelley pierced through things to their spiritual essence. He cared more for the world beyond than for the actual world around him. "I seek," he says, "in what I see, the manifestation

of something beyond the present and tangible object."

In his religious belief Shelley was an atheist. Antagonism to belief in a personal God is, according to William Rossetti, the chief informing purpose of the "Prometheus Unbound." The poem breathes hatred to historical Christianity. Yet this great lyrical drama should be carefully studied, not because of its ethical value, but as an exemplar of the logical product of the rationalism which was nurtured through two centuries in the garden of English song.

It is a noteworthy fact that the farther the human mind departs from Catholic truth the less will be the value of the expression of its genius in art. The "Divina Commedia" of Dante, representing the ages of faith, and the "Prometheus Unbound" of Shelley, representing the age of the Revolution, indicate pretty clearly the attitude of those two periods towards spiritual truth. There is no doubting which is the greater period or which the greater poem.

To Shelley there is no moral evil — no sin. He does not teach self-conquest, but rebellion against authority. It is true he would liberate humanity, but he offers us no help towards this liberation save the discipline of sorrow and doubt, — "the unlimited extension of limited conditions, and our

**The Logical  
Product of  
Rationalism.**



souls weary of the thought; whereas the poet of the 'Paradiso' promises us the knowledge of the Most High."

Dante represents a fulness of faith. Shelley represents the absence of all faith. The poets of the Revolution closed with their age and demanded freedom as an innate right. Dante promises us freedom through obedience, which, indeed, is the only true freedom.

"Prometheus Unbound" has its root in the Greek Æschylean myth. Like the "Divine Comedy" of Dante, Prometheus deals with spiritual forces, with the eternal conflict of good and evil; the action to be wrought out is in both the final redemption of the soul of man.

The Con-  
ception of  
"Prometheus  
Unbound."

"In 'Prometheus,'" says John Addington Symonds, "Shelley conceived a colossal work of art, and sketched out the main figures on a scale of surpassing magnificence. While painting in these figures he seems to reduce their proportions too much to the level of earthly life. He quits his god-creating, heaven-compelling throne of mythopœic inspiration and descends to a love story of Asia and Prometheus. In other words, he does not sustain the visionary and primeval dignity of these incarnated abstractions; nor, on the other hand, has he so elaborated their characters in detail as to

give them the substantiality of persons. There is therefore, something vague and hollow in both figures. Yet in the subordinate passages of the poem the true mythopœic faculty — the faculty of finding concrete forms for thought and of investing emotion with personality — shines forth with extraordinary force and clearness. We feel ourselves in the grasp of a primitive myth-maker while we read the description of Oceanus and the raptures of the Earth and Moon."

English genius tends to express itself through forms of experience and fact. An exception to this is, however, found in the work of **Its Idealism.** Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley. They are ideal, and the idealism which pervades such poems as the "Ancient Mariner" and "Hyperion" finds its fullest manifestation in the "Prometheus Unbound," which is the supreme achievement of Shelley.

In the creation of Prometheus Shelley has eliminated the taints which stain Milton's Satan and the Greek Prometheus. He has given us an ideal Prometheus, possessing all the qualities which go to make a perfect life. "Prometheus is, as it were," says the poet himself, "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends."

The dawn of the nineteenth century saw the rise of democracy. France expressed this democracy in brief historic act, while it was the work of England to express it in eternal art.

**The  
Democratic  
Idea in  
"Prometheus  
Unbound."**

Shelley voices this democracy in clearest tones in "Prometheus Unbound." Yet this democracy of Shelley cannot hope to govern, for it knows neither obedience nor authority, and without these democracy is an untamed beast. Shelley recognized fully the law of love. "Unterrified by the grim realities of pain and crime revealed in nature and society, he held fast to the belief that if we could but pierce to the core of things, if we could but be what we might be, the world and man would both attain to their perfection in eternal love." Shelley, like many of his poetic brethren, taught the rights of man, but forgot his correlative duties.

A genuine liking for "Prometheus Unbound," says a well known critic, may be reckoned the touchstone of a man's capacity for understanding lyric poetry. Scattered throughout the drama are lyrics which are very miracles of workmanship — charged with an ethereal music which belong rather to the spheres of heaven than the spheres of earth. The spirit voice in the air which sings the hymn of Asia, at the moment of her apotheosis, voices alike

**The Lyrical  
Character of  
"Prometheus  
Unbound."**

the highest expression of Shelley's lyrical genius and faith :

"Life of Life! Thy lips enkindle  
With their love the breath between them;  
And thy smiles before they dwindle  
Make the cold air fire; then screen them  
In those looks where whoso gazes  
Faints, entangled in their mazes.

"Child of Light! Thy limbs are burning  
Through the vest which seems to hide them,  
As the radiant lines of morning  
Through the clouds, ere they divide them;  
And this atmosphere divinest  
Shrouds thee wheresoe'er thou shinest.

"Fair are others; none beholds thee.  
But thy voice sounds low and tender,  
Like the fairest, for it folds thee  
From the sight, that liquid splendour,  
And all feel, yet see thee never,  
As I feel now lost forever.

"Lamp of Earth! where'er thou movest  
Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,  
And the souls of whom thou lovest  
Walk upon the wings with lightness,  
Till they fail as I am failing,  
Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing."

The "Divina Commedia" of Dante reflects as in a crystal sphere the ages of faith, Shelley's "Prome-

theus Unbound" the age of the Revolution. Both are symbolic. One was written in 1320, the other in 1819. The "Divina Commedia" represents a time of religious contemplation, "Prometheus" a time of revolution. With Dante the great purpose, the great problem, is the purification of the soul; with Shelley, the liberation of the soul. The central idea in Dante is obedience; the central idea in Shelley is freedom. The hero of the "Divina Commedia" is Dante the mystic, the hero of "Prometheus Unbound," Prometheus the rebel. Both poems tell the same story — the story of a human soul that moves from passion to peace. The characters of the two protagonists in these poems are thus contrasted by an eminent literary critic:

The "Divina Commedia" and "Prometheus Unbound": a Contrast.

"Prometheus is lofty of spirit, forgiving towards enemies, untouched by sin, nobly firm in the rejection of evil or compromise, patient through suffering, filled with compassion and with universal love. All these traits are shown to us in verse of sweetest harmonies. To what result? We place beside Shelley's faultless Titan the ashen Florentine, with tight-set lip and the sign of sin on his forehead, and straightway human life becomes a holier thing. For the greatness of the human soul is to be measured less by the qualities

it possesses than by the resistance it has overcome. The majesty of Prometheus springs from his resistance of tyranny without; but having no foes to fight within he suggests vacuity. Dante has sinned, therefore he is lower than Prometheus; he feels penitence, and therefore he is higher. He knows experiences into which the elemental Titan of Shelley cannot enter, — the rapture of pardon, the blessing of humility, the might of worship.

"Into the mediæval protagonist has passed the passion of generations; into the hero of the modern poet have passed the theories of his author. The scope of emotion is vastly greater in the older poem. Prometheus cannot hate; Dante is supreme as a hater. If the modern attitude seem the higher we must remember that the charity of Prometheus finds its source in his fatalism. To Shelley the sense of moral responsibility is a shadow; Dante passes with silent scorn souls that have chosen evil for their god."

Professor Trent, of the University of the South, is a clear, thoughtful, and, generally speaking, sound critic. It is evident from the following estimate that he is not borne away by the praise lavished at times on this representative and epochal poem of Shelley's. Referring to the "Prometheus Unbound" and the extravagant claims put forth for it, Professor Trent says:

An Estimate of  
the "Prometheus  
Unbound."

"With regard to what may be called the intellectual claims put forth for this poem, which has been edited for schools and been made the subject of essays by the dozen, I can say only that, however true they may be when applied to special passages, they are by no means true when applied to the drama as a whole. The fourth act which is a favorite with the Shelleyans, seems to have been an afterthought and is a most lame and impotent conclusion. The characters are, except for short intervals, vague, misty, and devoid of personality. The solution proposed for the problem of human destiny, for the freeing of the Promethean spirit of man, is as impossible and ineffectual as if it had been generated in the heated brain of a maniac. This great poem is really little more than a series of wonderful phantasmagoria flashed forth upon the curtain of the reader's mind by a very unsteady hand. When the reader voluntarily shuts off the light, *i. e.* ceases to think or judge, the effect is dazzling; when he allows the light of reason to play upon his mind the effect is just the reverse. I admire the 'Prometheus Unbound' as the daring and, in parts, splendid achievement of a brilliant, unbalanced, but nobly poetic nature; but I cannot admit that it is worthy of language which would be hyperbolical in the case of any other poet than Shakespeare or Milton."

## QUESTIONS.

1. What is necessary in order to understand Shelley's work?
2. Of what is "Prometheus Unbound" the supreme expression?
3. Describe Shelley's creed.
4. What, according to William Rossetti, is the chief informing purpose of the "Prometheus Unbound"?
5. Why should this great lyrical drama be carefully studied?
6. Compare the "Prometheus Unbound" and the "Divina Commedia" as representing Rationalism and Catholicism.
7. Explain the conception of the "Prometheus Unbound." How does it compare with the "Divina Commedia" in its conception?
8. Give briefly John Addington Symonds' appreciation of the poem.
9. What is the tendency of English poetic genius?
10. Name some exceptions to this tendency. Where does idealism find its fullest manifestation?
11. How is the ideal impersonation of Prometheus described by Shelley?
12. How was democracy expressed in England and France at the dawn of the nineteenth century?
13. Why cannot the democracy of Shelley as expressed in the "Prometheus Unbound" hope to govern?
14. How would Shelley have the world and man attain to their perfection?



**"PROMETHEUS UNBOUND"**

91

15. What is the lyrical character of "Prometheus Unbound"?

16. Contrast briefly the "Divina Commedia" and "Prometheus Unbound."

17. Justify Professor Trent's estimate of the "Prometheus Unbound."

## KEATS'S "EVE OF ST. AGNES."

ABOUT the literary fame of no other English poet has the strife of critics been so intensely and bitterly waged as that of poor John Keats, — from the brutal assaults of **A Word about the Genius of Keats.** "Blackwood's Magazine" and the "Quarterly Review" to the kindly words of Sir James Mackintosh, indignant at the cruel and savage attacks made upon our young, sensitive poet, and the letter of admiration by Lord Jeffrey, wherein he wrote, "I never regretted anything more than to have been too late with my testimony to his merits." Indeed the name of John Keats continued to be for some time a very storm centre — now dark with the clouds of bitterness and wrath, now brightened by the rays of just appreciation and praise.

The voices of Keats's contemporaries were so loud in the academic groves of English song, that Keats remained for the time unheard, unheeded. In the year of Keats's birth, 1795, Wordsworth was twenty-five, Coleridge twenty-three, Southey twenty-one, Landor twenty, and Scott



JOHN KEATS



twenty-four. Byron and Shelley, of volcanic and ethereal fame, were at the time too young for even poetic dreams, while Leigh Hunt, who was destined to be in future years Keats's warm and constant friend, had just reached his eleventh year.

It was, however, fortunate for Keats that he had fallen upon such a period, when, as Dr. Hamilton Mabie says, "the intellectual and spiritual tides were rising, and English literature was recalling, in the breadth and splendour of its movement, the great Elizabethan age." It was enough that Keats responded to his time, and his genius took birth from what Matthew Arnold rightly considers to be the powers that concur in the creation of a master-work of literature: "the power of the man and the power of the moment."

The very essence of Keats's poetic creed is to be found in his lines:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty, — that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

His poetic vision pierced the soul of things. It was not merely surface beauty which concerned him, it was that beauty which is the reflection of the very soul of things. "When I wrote it," he said of one of his poems, "it was a regular stepping of the imagination toward a truth." In

another place our young poet writes: "Scenery is fine, but human nature is finer. The sward is richer for the tread of a real nervous English foot; the eagle's nest is finer for the mountaineer having looked into it."

Keats's imagination was fed and fashioned by his early reading. He dipped into old classical mythology, finding room for his fancy in the pages of "Tooke's Pantheon," "Spence's Polymetis," and "Lempriere's Dictionary." It was Charles Cowden Clarke who first introduced him to the glowing pages of Spenser. Together they read the "Epithalamium," and Keats borrowed from his friend the "Faerie Queene," "ramping," as Clarke writes, "through the scenes of the romance like a young horse turned into a spring meadow." The most poetic of poets became to his young heart a passionate delight. He revelled in the color and imagery of Spenser's great allegory, catching up with the wings of his spirit the mystical beauty and splendor of its enchanted lines. "He hoisted himself up," says Clarke, "and looked burly and dominant as he said, 'What an image that is — *sea-shouldering whales!*'" It was the full birth of poetry in his mind. The boy had suddenly become a poet.

Such is the influence of genius upon genius; yet, as a critic remarks, the genius of Keats was too

**Preparation  
for Poetic  
Work.**

virile and original to be dominated or held as debtor by even a master of song. There is no doubt that Keats owes much to Spenser. His first poem, "Imitation of Spenser," testifies to this. Surely there could be nothing more Spenserian in mould, spirit, and color than the following lines which form the opening stanza of this poem:

"Now morning from her orient chamber came,  
And her first footsteps touched a verdant hill:  
Crowning its lawny crest with amber flame,  
Silvering the untainted gushes of its rill;  
Which, pure from mossy beds, did dawn distil,  
And after parting beds of simple flowers,  
By many streams a little lake did fill,  
Which round its marge reflected woven bowers,  
And in its middle space, a sky that never lowers."

During the winter of 1819 Keats produced a noble group of poems — "Hyperion," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "Ode to Psyche," "Ode to a Nightingale," and "The Eve of St. Agnes."

A Group of  
Poems.

"Endymion" had already reached the public, and the reviews had accorded it a most ungracious welcome. The opinion has gained credence, somewhat widely too, that the reviewers killed Keats, and that there was some truth in Byron's jingling rhyme referring to our modern young Greek as "that fiery particle snuffed out by a magazine

article." Such a tradition has done too much honor to the whole brood of brutal reviewers, whose crime was not murder, but vulgarity and stupidity. Keats possessed too sound a nature, too great a mind, to be killed by adverse criticism. No doubt he felt the meanness of the attacks made upon him. Referring to these he writes :

"Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic of his own work. . . . The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man. It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself. That which is creative must create itself. In 'Endymion' I leapt headlong into the sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks than if I had stayed upon the shore and piped a silly pipe and taken tea and comfortable advice. I was never afraid of failure ; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest."

"I have loved the principle of beauty in all things," said the author of "Hyperion," during "Eve of St. Agnes." the closing days of his life. In this our young poet was certainly a modern Greek. But while he had the temperament of the Greek in his delight in beauty and his repose in it, his manner was, as Dr. Hamilton Mabie



points out, pre-eminently romantic. Take for instance "The Eve of St. Agnes." In form and idea the poem belongs to the romantic. It is full of color and warmth and fragrance. Speaking of this exquisite poem. Dr. Mabie says: "There is no magic of colour in written speech that is not mixed in the diction of 'The Eve of St. Agnes,'—a vision of beauty deep, rich, and glowing as one of those dyed windows in which the heart of the Middle Ages still burns."

It is interesting to note how differently Keats and Tennyson treat the same poetic theme. "The Eve of St. Agnes" is a good exemplification of this. Tennyson's "Eve of St. Agnes" is more severe and classical than is that of Keats, while there is a warmth and fragrance in Keats's poem

**Treatment  
of the Same  
Theme by  
Keats and  
Tennyson  
Contrasted.**

entirely wanting to Tennyson's. Keats approaches the theme through the avenue of romance, giving color and glow to his lines within the radiant dome of his imagination. The genius of Tennyson turns from the romantic to the ascetic and devotional and paints a St. Agnes more in accordance with the life and spirit of the early saints, and martyrs. Tennyson's is the more real and Catholic, Keats's the more ideal and pagan.

Keats was responsive to the beauty of the world around him. He was sensuous, but his love of the

beautiful was something more than that of the surface. Keats's vision penetrated the soul of things, and his greatness lay in his mastery of the unity of life and his identification of the highest beauty with the highest truth.

How far  
"The Eve of  
St. Agnes"  
Reflects  
the Genius  
of Keats.

His genius is well reflected in "The Eve of St. Agnes." It is, as the poet himself said, a regular stepping of the imagination towards a truth. "The Eve of St. Agnes" is not only radiant with beauty, it is beauty itself. Its poetic thought is flashed through the cloister windows of the imagination and is warm with the breath of incense and prayer. Take for instance the twenty-fourth stanza of this poem. Did poet ever before write lines so full of pomp and grace and color as the following? —

"A casement, high and triple-arched, there was,  
All garlanded with carven imageries  
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,  
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,  
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,  
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damasked wings;  
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,  
And *Twilight* saints, and dim emblazonings,  
Ashiel'd 'scutcheon *Blush'd* with blood of queens and kings."

"The Eve of St. Agnes" is, indeed, a casket of gems. Perhaps there is nothing finer in the forty-two stanzas that make up the entire poem than the following exquisite lines:

Some Pas-  
sages of Rare  
Beauty.

"Soon trembling in her soft and chilly nest,  
In sort of wakeful swoon, perplexed she lay,  
Until the poppied warmth of sleep oppressed  
Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away,  
*Flown like a thought until the morrow-day ;*  
*Blissfully havened both from joy and pain ;*  
*Clasped like a missal where swart Paynims pray ;*  
*Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,*  
*As though a rose should shut and be a bud again."*

Again, what could be more beautiful than the  
twenty-fifth stanza ? —

"Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,  
And threw warm *gules* on Madeline's fair breast,  
As down she knelt for Heaven's grace and boon ;  
*Rose-bloom fell on her hands together prest,*  
*And on her silver cross soft amethyst,*  
*And on her hair a glory like a saint :*  
She seemed a splendid angel, newly drest,  
*Save wings, for heaven.* Porphyro grew faint :  
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint."

Commenting on this passage Leigh Hunt writes :  
"The lovely and innocent creature, thus praying  
under the gorgeous painted window, completes the  
exceeding and unique beauty of this picture, —  
one that will forever stand by itself in poetry as an  
addition to the stock. It would have struck a  
glow on the face of Shakespeare himself. He  
might have put Imogen or Ophelia under such a  
shrine. How proper as well as pretty the heraldic

term *gules*, considering the occasion. *Red* would not have been a fiftieth part so good. And with what elegant luxury he touches the 'silver cross' with 'amethyst' and the fair woman with 'rose-color,' the kin to their carnation."

There is little doubt but that Keats was possessed of great poetic endowments. Had his

**The Place of  
John Keats in  
the Pantheon  
of English  
Poetry.**

genius fully ripened it might have given him a place side by side with Shakespeare and Milton. As Dr. Hamilton Mabie justly remarks: "It is enough that except Shakespeare no other English poet has found such color in our speech, has made it linger in the ear in phrase so rich and full. This magical note, heard only in the greatest poetry, is heard in Keats,—the evidence alike of the rare quality of his genius and its depth and power."

#### QUESTIONS.

1. What appreciation was shown for the genius of Keats by his contemporaries?
2. What may be termed the essence of Keats's poetic creed?
3. How did Keats make his preparation for his poetic work?
4. To whom did Keats owe much for his inspiration?
5. What group of poems did Keats produce in 1819?

"EVE OF ST. AGNES"

101

6. How was "Endymion" received by the critics, and how was Keats affected?

7. What was the temperament of Keats, and in which poem is it best illustrated?

8. Compare the treatment of "The Eve of St. Agnes" by Keats and Tennyson.

9. How far does "The Eve of St. Agnes" reflect the genius of Keats?

10. What place has John Keats in the Pantheon of English poetry?

## GRAY'S "ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD."

THE genius of English poetry has given the world some very beautiful elegies. Milton's "Lycidas," the first great elegy in English poetry, is commemorative of the death of the poet's young friend Thomas King; Tennyson's "In Memoriam" embalms in immortal verse the memory of one of the most perfect young men that have ever lived in the tide of times — Arthur Hallam; and Swinburne's "Ave atque Vale" and Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis" are noble tributes in elegiac verse to the gifted souls whom death snatched untimely from our planet. Nor should Shelley's sweet and sad lament over the death of John Keats — his beloved Adonais — be denied a place amongst the greatest of English elegies.

Gray was a contemplative and reflective poet, and the spirit of his muse sought a kindred environment. The "Elegy" is the very embodiment and incarnation of evening regret. There is no doubt

Origin,  
Setting, and  
Import of  
Gray's  
"Elegy."



*Gray*





"ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD" 103

that it was within the sacred precincts of Stoke Poges churchyard, while contemplating each "frail memorial" and deciphering the rude inscriptions "spelt by th' unlettered muse," that Gray first conceived the idea of writing the "Elegy." The thoughts which flooded his mind as he moved noiselessly through the aisles of "God's Acre" as the mantle of eventide descended upon the cold shoulders of day, were thoughts common to humanity. The every-day drama of the poor filled the theatre of his heart. Their narrow kingdom knew not gold or purple, but love built for them her lily walls and carpeted the floors with blossoms of peace.

Gray's "Elegy" is Burns' "Cotter's Saturday Night" amplified and transplanted to English soil. Surely the reader can have no difficulty in finding in Burns' beautiful idyll the counterpart of the following lines:

"For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,  
Or busy housewife ply her evening care;  
No children run to lisp their sire's return,  
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share."

We do not believe, as some critics maintain, that Gray's fame rests in this poem upon his skill as an artist. The poet himself attributed the popularity of the "Elegy" to the nature of its subject, holding that it would have had a like

popularity had it been written in prose. The secret of the greatness of the "Elegy" as a poem resides in its subject, which touches the universal heart and lifts mankind to a plane of true kinship in death. Of course there is no doubting the artistic merits of the poem.

In support of this view it may be well to quote here the opinion of Hales, in his introduction to the poem. He says: "The 'Elegy' is, perhaps, the most widely known poem in our language. The reason of this extensive popularity is, perhaps, to be sought in the fact that it expresses in an exquisite manner feelings and thoughts that are universal. In the current of ideas in the 'Elegy' there is, perhaps, nothing that is rare or exceptional or out of the common way. The musings are of the most rational and obvious character possible; it is difficult to conceive of any one musing under similar circumstances who should not muse so; but they are not the less deep and moving on this account. The mystery of life does not become clearer or less solemn and awful for any amount of contemplation. Such inevitable, such everlasting questions as rise in the mind when one lingers in the precincts of death, can never lose their freshness, never cease to fascinate and to move. It is with such questions, that would have been commonplace long ages since, if they

"ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD" 105

could ever be so, that the 'Elegy' deals. It deals with them in no lofty, philosophical manner, but in a simple, humble, unpretentious way, always with the truest and broadest humanity. The poet's thoughts turn to the poor; he forgets the fine tombs inside the church, and thinks only of the 'mouldering heaps' in the churchyard. Hence the problem that especially suggests itself is the potential greatness, when they lived, of 'the rude forefathers' that now lie at his feet. He does not and cannot solve it, though he finds consideration to mitigate the sadness it must inspire; but he expresses it in all its awfulness in the most effective language and with the deepest feeling; and his expression of it has become a living part of our language."

Gray's "Elegy" is unlike any other of the great elegies in that it is impersonal. Its subject touches the universal,—the life of man horizoned by a lowly firmament, in which burns neither star of glory nor meteor of fame.

**The Inform-  
ing Idea in  
the Poem.**

The informing idea in the poem is to be found in the stanza —

"Let not ambition mock their useful toil,  
Their homely joys and destiny obscure;  
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile  
The short and simple annals of the poor."

All the rest of the poem is but an amplification of the thought in this stanza. Truly, Gray has built of the "Elegy" a monument more lasting than a niche in Westminster Abbey, for the thought so delicately and sincerely enshrined in this beautiful poem will outlive the most cunning or artistic touch of sculptor when embodying his dream in Carrara marble. By this elegy Gray becomes laureate of the poor. It is their round of toil — their simple annals — their narrow cells that mould, fashion, and give purpose to the "Elegy." The whole poem leads up to the central idea — the informing idea — that man is great, not by virtue of the magnitude of his achievements, but by virtue of the performance of his duties. The "rude forefathers of the hamlet," though denied by fortune to sway the rod of empire, are, nevertheless, not to be mocked or contemned, for within their narrow spheres they performed each pressing and incumbent duty. If they became not real Hampdens or voiceful Miltons it was because —

"Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife  
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;  
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life  
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way."

Now, what is the peculiar charm of the "Elegy"? James Russell Lowell says: "It is to be found in

"ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD" 107

its embodying that pensively stingless pessimism which comes with the first gray hair; that vague sympathy with ourselves which is so much cheaper than sympathy with others; that placid melancholy which satisfies the general appetite for an emotion which titillates rather than wounds." We think, however, that its charm, its peculiar charm, is a thing quite apart from this "stingless pessimism which comes with the first gray hair," and rests in the simplicity and universality of its thought enshrined in language at once clear, beauteous, and harmonious. It will be noticed that in the "Elegy" Gray is more pictorial than imaginative. Indeed there is scarcely a stanza in the poem that would not form an excellent subject for a painting. The opening lines have oft been transferred to canvas.

How far does the "Elegy" reflect the genius of Gray? We think that the chief characteristics of Tennyson are mirrored in the "In Memoriam," the chief characteristics of Wordsworth in the "Ode to Immortality," the chief characteristics of Coleridge in the "Ancient Mariner." Is not the "Elegy" a very mirror wherein you may see reflected, not only the poetic genius of Thomas Gray, but something also of the form and spirit of eighteenth-century verse. Decorum was the religion of the

**Its Peculiar  
Charm.**

**How Far the  
"Elegy" Re-  
flects the  
Genius of  
Gray.**

eighteenth century. Gray worshipped at its shrine. He tells us that the style he aimed at was extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous, and musical, and this he assuredly reached in the "Elegy." He united in himself genius and diletanteism. Poetry is said to be divine madness, but the English poets of the eighteenth century were the sanest of the sane. As Lowell says, no English poet between 1700 and 1800 need have feared a writ *de lunatico inquirendo*. Still there are hints in the "Elegy" that the heart of man was turning for inspiration to the shrine of nature. A critic says that Gray *never spoke out*, — that his thought lacked spontaneity. "He was a poetical scholar and scholarly poet. His poetry twined itself around his learning and was saturated by it. He planted himself in bookish soil and flowered at last into verse."

Gray was a great admirer of Dryden and borrowed from him the form or mould in which the "Elegy" is cast. It is the iambic pentameter measure. Of course it was not original with Dryden, being first employed by Raleigh. It is a measure which fits the theme most admirably. The reader cannot fail to note its suitability for pictorial effect. Gray had a thorough knowledge of perspective, while his skill as an artist in combining words and

Technique and  
Language of  
the "Elegy."

"ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD" 109

sounds gave him a complete command over the resources of melody. This, as a writer remarks, explains why he is so easy to remember: why, though he wrote so little, so much of what he wrote is familiar on men's tongues.

It is claimed that Gray borrowed his phrases and language from other poets. For instance, take this stanza —

"Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,  
Their furrow oft the *stubborn glebe* has broke;  
How jocund did they drive their team *afield*!  
How bow'd the woods beneath their *sturdy stroke*!"

*Stubborn glebe* is found in Gay, *afield* in Milton, and *sturdy stroke* in Spenser. But has any poet in his vocabulary the right of *eminent domain*? Is not the English language the inheritance of the people? The gold coinage of exchange when minted may pass through a thousand hands — always remaining the property of the possessor.

It is not just, therefore, to Gray to regard his "Elegy" as a mosaic made up of phrases borrowed from other poets; it requires genius in itself to give a fit robing to thought, and certainly it must be conceded that the author of the "Elegy" has dressed his poetic offspring in purple and fine linen.

Few poems have been so tampered with in the

text as the "Elegy." Editors and publishers have, as Thackeray would say, put their hoofs and horns through it. It will be remembered that it was first published in book form by Dodsley, in February, 1751. Two manuscripts of the "Elegy" in Gray's handwriting still exist. One of these is known as the Pembroke manuscript, which is to be found in Pembroke Hall, Cambridge University, and the other is known as the Wrightson manuscript. As W. J. Rolfe, in his edition of Gray's poems, points out, there is little doubt that the latter is the original manuscript of the "Elegy." Of course, not a few of the emendations were made by Gray himself in the various editions which were published. Let us here note some of these :

**A Word as to  
Certain  
Emendations.**

The fifth stanza originally read—

"Forever sleep : the breezy call of morn,  
Or swallow twit'ring from the straw-built shed,  
Or chanticleer so shrill or echoing horn,  
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed."

The fourteenth stanza read thus :

"Some village Cato, who, with dauntless breast,  
The little tyrant of his field withstood ;  
Some mute inglorious Tully here may rest,  
Some Cæsar guiltless of his country's blood."

The substitution of the names of three Englishmen for the three Romans, Cato, Tully, and Cæsar,



"ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD" 111

indicated in Gray's time the going out of the classic taste, or fashion, which had first taken root in the period of the *Renaissance*.

After the twenty-fifth stanza came the following stanza which was omitted in subsequent editions:

"Him have we seen the greenwood side along,  
While o'er the heath we hied, our labour done,  
Oft as the woodlark pip'd her farewell song,  
With wistful eyes pursue the setting sun."

Concerning this stanza, Mason remarks: "I rather wonder that he rejected this stanza, as it not only has the same sort of Doric delicacy which charms us peculiarly in this part of the poem, but also completes the account of his whole day; whereas, this evening scene being omitted, we have only his morning walk and his noontide repose."

Lord Mahon, when telling of the capture of Quebec, in 1759, in his History of England, relates how General Wolfe paid a beautiful tribute to the "Elegy." It was on the night of September 13th, 1759 — the night preceding the battle on the Plains of Abraham; Wolfe was descending the St. Lawrence with a part of his troops. The historian says: "Swiftly but silently did the boats fall down with the tide, unobserved by the enemy's sentinels at their posts along the shores. Of the soldiers on board how eagerly must every heart have throbbed at the

General Wolfe  
and the  
"Elegy."

coming conflict! How intently must every eye have contemplated the dark outline, as it lay pencilled upon the midnight sky, and as every moment it grew closer and clearer, of the hostile heights! Not a word was spoken — not a sound heard beyond the rippling of the stream. Wolfe alone — thus tradition has told us — repeated in a low tone to the other officers in his boat those beautiful stanzas with which a country churchyard inspired the muse of Gray. One noble line, —

‘The paths of glory lead but to the grave,’ —

must have seemed at such a moment fraught with mournful meaning. At the close of the recitation Wolfe added, ‘Now, gentlemen, I would rather be the author of that poem than take Quebec.’”

The whole “Elegy” is a casket of gems, and difficult is the task amid such riches to select the **Some** passages of rare beauty. Surely the **Passages of** following stanzas are true to the atmosphere of their setting! Surely, too, their music and verbal lustre must touch and charm both eye and heart:

“The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,  
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,  
The cock’s shrill clarion or the echoing horn,  
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

. . . . .

"ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD" 113

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene  
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear;  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

The place of the "Elegy" must unquestionably be among the classics of English poetry. It contains but one hundred and eighteen lines, every line of which is quotable and full of that polish and splendor which only real poetic artistry can impart. To no other poem in the English language has the genius of mankind paid such homage in translation as to the "Elegy." Of these translations there have been: one in Hebrew, seven in Greek, twelve in Latin, thirteen in Italian, fifteen in French, six in German, and one in Portuguese.

The Place of  
the "Elegy"  
in English  
Poetry.

The fame of Thomas Gray is assuredly secured in the "Elegy" against the teeth of time.

QUESTIONS.

1. Name the great elegies in English poetry.
2. What is the origin and import of Gray's "Elegy"?
3. To what is the greatness of Gray's "Elegy" attributed?

4. What is the informing idea of the poem ?
5. What resemblance is there between the "Elegy" and Burns' "Cotter's Saturday Night" ?
6. What is the peculiar charm of Gray's "Elegy" ?
7. How far does the "Elegy" reflect the genius of Gray ?
8. Explain why the "Elegy" is easy to remember.
9. What does the substitution of the three English names for the three Roman names — Cato, Tully, and Caesar — in the "Elegy," indicate ?
10. What beautiful tribute did General Wolfe pay to the author of the "Elegy" ?
11. What place does the "Elegy" hold in English poetry ?
12. How has the world shown appreciation of the "Elegy" ?

gy”

s of

lish  
and

y to

lish

the